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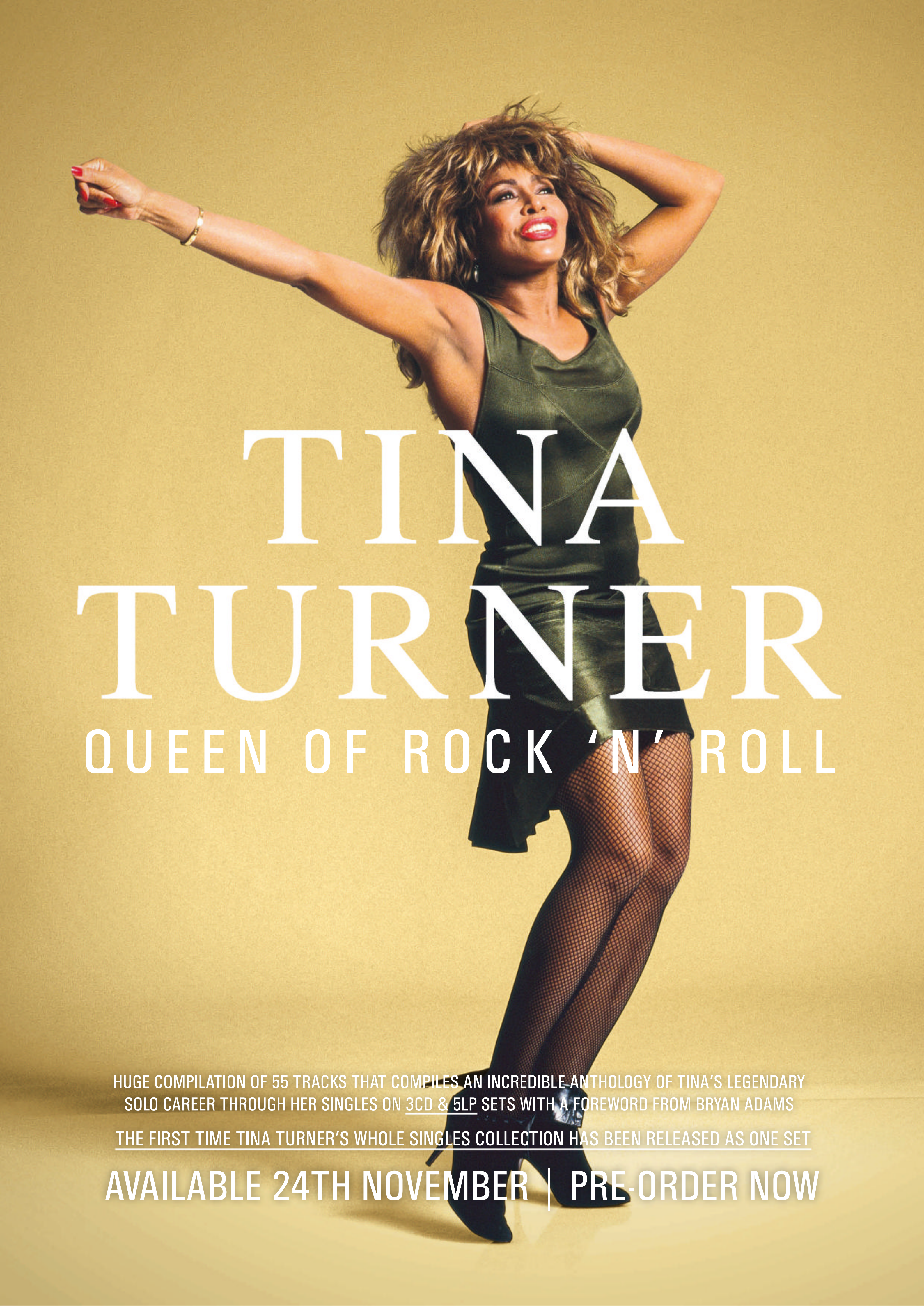

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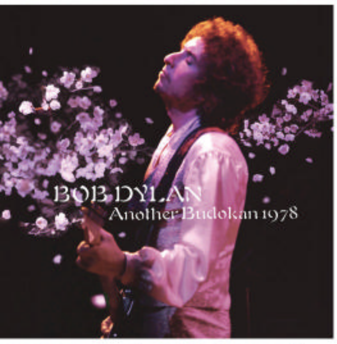

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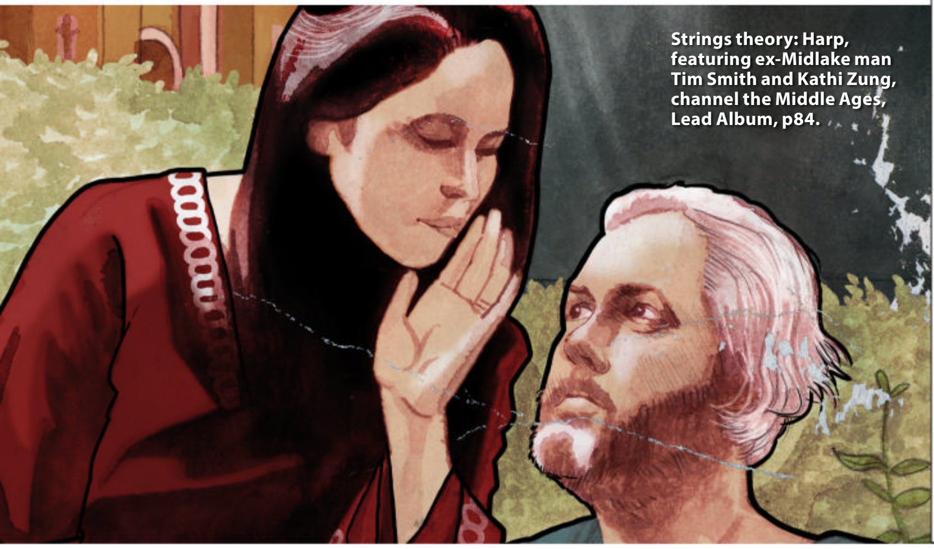

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE…

James McNair

A Whitley Bay transplant via East Kilbride and London, James has visited the Falkland Islands with The Stranglers, he's had coffee *chez* Ennio Morricone, and Art Garfunkel told him he could "hold a tune". This issue, his bedroom-shrine dreams (see photo) come true as he interviews childhood hero Geddy Lee on page 28.

John Aizlewood

When the infant John bought *Kimono My House* from Boyes department store, Bridlington, it doubled his LP collection, following the purchase of The Hotshots' *Snoopy Vs The Red Baron*. He still plays both today, invariably while writing about music, sport and TV for assorted parties. Read his How To Buy Sparks on page 108.

Borja

Fine art painter, record designer, illustrator and Beatlemaniac. Established within the figurative/hyperrealist style, his works deal with issues varying from war to calmer topics such as his Decline Of The West series, where destroyed records talk about the passing of time. He is currently working on a new solo show for 2024.

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Julien Baker

BOYGENIUS WOMAN

What music are you currently grooving to?

Mitski's *The Land Is Inhospitable And So Are We*, I've been listening to it non-stop. Also **Zulu**'s *A New Tomorrow*, **Sufjan Stevens**' *Javelin*, *Left Hand* by **Becca Mancari** and *Rat Saw God* by **Wednesday**.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

If I were to be shipwrecked on a desert island… *Catch For Us The Foxes* by **Mewithoutyou**. I would have said **Death Cab For Cutie**'s *Transatlanticism* and *Control* by **Pedro The Lion** as well… hard to pick one.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Either/Or by **Elliott Smith**. I bought it at an FYE in the Wolfchase mall in Memphis. I first heard him in early high school in Wes Anderson's [2001 film] The Royal Tenenbaums and it had a profound emotional impact on me [Baker has covered Smith's *Either/Or* song Ballad Of Big Nothing live and in the studio].

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I've never wanted to be another musician, sometimes I've not even wanted to be myself.

What do you sing in the shower?

Sitting Is The Opposite Of Standing by **Brian Jordan Alvarez** [novelty meme tune which has spawned covers including an AI version as recorded by Talking Heads].

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

I like **Muna**'s self-titled record from last year.

And your Sunday morning record?

Lady In Satin by **Billie Holiday**. So, so great.

Julien Baker is part of Boygenius with Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus. Their album The Record is out now on Interscope.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING…

Sarabeth Tucek

AKA SBT

What music are you currently grooving to?

On the turntable quite a bit these days is *Holiday Camp* from **Those Pretty Wrongs** and *Sincerely* by **Dwight Twilley** (RIP). Also, **Morgan Noise**, an up-and-coming UK artist whose next single I hope to release.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

An insane question! I'm having a full-blown panic attack. Geez, OK. I'm staring at my records and saying sorry to them and explaining that I still love them… but I have to go with **The Velvet Underground**'s *The Velvet Underground*. I could do *Loaded* too. I think that band was an awakening for me on multiple levels. It provided a road map for how to be, think, live. When I listen to it, I feel rooted but unbound.

Alysse Gafkjen, Paula Bullwinkel, Spitfire Audio

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I wish I could remember the record – I know the first record store I started going to alone was in 7th grade in NYC called St Mark's Sounds. A lot of my records still have the St Mark's sticker on them. It must have been something my mom or dad didn't already have so probably **Gary Numan**'s *Tubeway Army* record or **Blondie** *Parallel Lines*.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

So many! Any member of **The Beatles**, **Poison Ivy** from The Cramps, **Pete Townshend**, **Prince**, **Kim Deal** from the Pixies.

What do you sing in the shower?

It's funny what happens to your musical taste when you get in the shower. I know in movies people have a lot of serious moments in the shower but I have a tendency to sing Midnight At The Oasis.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Born To Run by **Bruce Springsteen**. It makes me want to attack the night.

And your Sunday morning record?

Neil Young *Homegrown*, with a side of **Al Green**'s *I'm Still In Love With You*. Yum.

SBT's Joan Of All is out now on Ocean Omen.

Trevor Horn

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What music are you currently grooving to?

Compilations of '60s and '70s singles, in the car – **The Box Tops**, Spirit In The Sky, random things. I'm interested in what drum sounds they have and what desk they used – now it's all done with computers, it's pretty hard to identify something, but with these, you kind of can, you know?

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Hats by **The Blue Nile**. That Scottish melancholy appeals to me. It's nicely under-produced. I wish they'd done more.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I used to say it was Multiplication by **Bobby Darin**, but my eldest sister got really cross with me and said she'd bought that, so I've had to rethink. I think it was *With The Beatles*, from House Of Andrews in Durham. It made me want to play in a band.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I kind of fantasised about being **John Lennon**… I've always admired really good musicians but I don't think I've really wanted to be them.

What do you sing in the shower?

Ripples by **Genesis**. I love the way it goes "sail away, away…"

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

September by **Earth, Wind & Fire**. I've no idea what it means – but if you played it in an undertakers' parlour, the corpses would get out of their coffins and dance.

And your Sunday morning record?

If I'm going to play something chilled, **Debussy**'s The Sunken Cathedral, the Isao Tomita version of it. I'll play it and watch the political arguments on TV.

Trevor Horn's Echoes: Ancient & Modern is released by Deutsche Grammophon on December 1.

> "Play Earth, Wind & Fire in an undertakers and the corpses would get up and dance."
> **TREVOR HORN**

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H Bauer Publishing
The Lantern
75 Hampstead Road
London NW1 2PL
Tel: 020 7437 9011
Reader queries: mojoreaders@bauermedia.co.uk
Subscriber queries: bauer@subscription.co.uk
General e-mail: mojo@bauermedia.co.uk
Website: mojo4music.com

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"YOU DON'T EXPECT MEN IN THEIR middle fifties to write tunes," Damon Albarn tells us this month. "That's supposed to have long abandoned you." Albarn, we discover, is currently indulging his inner Mozart and working on a sequel to The Magic Flute. But it's his activities fronting a revitalised Blur that most concern us in our wide-ranging review of 2023.

As Blur and Pulp brought their nuanced takes on '90s revivalism, and even Taylor Swift embarked on a thorough inventory of her past on the Eras tour, 2023 found new generations embracing their own kinds of nostalgia and older artists moving into rewarding new stages of their careers. Four singers in our Top 75 albums of the year – Paul Simon, John Cale, Ian Hunter and Shirley Collins – are over 80, and it's a near-certainty The Rolling Stones would've been in there too if our voters had heard *Hackney Diamonds* before our deadline. There were comebacks galore – not least from our cover stars, The Beatles – alongside a wealth of younger talent jostling for the laurels: Lankum, Grian Chatten, Boygenius, Julie Byrne, my personal favourites The Tubs.

"All music kind of exists simultaneously," proposed MOJO's founding Editor, Paul Du Noyer, when we were celebrating our 30th birthday in the autumn. And this year, more than ever, it felt as if the musical continuum was serendipitously collapsing in on itself. Younger artists looked back, older ones surged forwards. It was, once again, a tremendous year for music, and we're very grateful you chose to spend it with us. Remember: MOJO is for life, not just for Christmas.

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

Let's play. We're gonna have a lot of fun.

I've been a subscriber since 2006 (and regular reader before that), but I think this is my first time writing. Your 30th anniversary issue was excellent and I enjoyed the journey back through the years. I was surprised that Radiohead did not feature at all in this, though – surely one of the most important bands of the last 30 years – while Dylan was included twice? I'm sure there are lots of different opinions around the Top 10 MOJO CDs, but I'd put the *Buried Treasures* one included with MOJO 360 right up there. Every track was great, and it was interesting to hear the production techniques of Joe Meek after Creation Rebel; I'd never really considered how his sound was a precursor to dub before. Hopefully this will become a regular series like the *Heavy Nuggets* CDs.

Kirk Burton, Aberdeen

I'll change my teeth, you change your goddamned diapers

Since 30 Stars For The Next 30 Years [MOJO 360] is supposed to generate debate, just going to say I'm going to have *my* eyes (and ears) on Sunny War, Ibibio Sound Machine, Angel Olsen, Theo Lawrence, Low Cut Connie and Raye, who absolutely stole this year's Glastonbury.

Nick Black, via e-mail

I just want your best game

I've read MOJO pretty much forever and am excited that the magazine is celebrating 30 years of publishing, especially in this day and age of dwindling print media. But I have to say the MOJO 360 cover, which is all white musicians, is a real problem. You could have put Kendrick Lamar or Kamasi Washington on there, or even your go-to cover stars, Jimi Hendrix or Bob Marley. Seriously, in this day and age you can't be this myopic to the contributions of black and other musicians of colour. I've got to say I'm not impressed, and you have to step it up in the future. Your magazine is a great thing. It's time to make it better.

Ian Cauthery, via e-mail

Hey, what's wrong with you guys? It's a joke, OK?

Longtime subscriber, thank you for years of beautiful and informative reads you've delivered to us. In your piece on references to MOJO spotted in popular culture [MOJO 360], it's strange how you omitted mentioning a great British musical comedy, Still Crazy (1998), about ageing rockers – it's also the name of my cover band of the same age, here in Sarajevo! Tony the keyboard player loses Jimi Hendrix's tooth that he had worn for ages around his neck as his good-luck charm. Back on the touring bus, drummer Beano shows Tony a cover of MOJO with Jimi on it, but with a front tooth missing – Beano had "photo-shopped" it out with a ballpoint pen.

Saša Leskovac, Sarajevo

Maybe I'm hustling you, maybe I'm not

Finally, an article of some substance about Hawkwind [MOJO 359]. As a college journo I was going through the LPs at the late lamented St Mark's Records shop in New York's East Village in winter 1973. I had been reading about Hawkwind in Melody Maker, and St Mark's had two of their LPs, *Hawkwind* and *Doremi Fasol Latido*. I was instantly taken by the contents, and I subsequently wrote to manager Doug Smith – who wrote back. Thus began an association that led to my publishing what I think was Hawkwind's first US record review, seeing their first performance at The Academy of Music in NYC, attending the afterparty at New York's Hayden Planetarium, and teaching Nik Turner how to navigate the New York City subway system. My vantage point also showed me that United Artists' US label had no idea how to publicise the band or get them even minimal radio airplay, effectively relegating the band to cult status. I managed to see the band on every one of its US tours, and I can only hope there's some chance Dave Brock can travel back across the Atlantic for one more swing of the Warrior's Sword. Play on, space rockers, we're all still born to go!

Norman Gaines, Hartsdale NY

A lot of guys are doing it – but only one guy can be the best

MOJO 361 was eagerly awaited and anticipated by me, as I thought you might give a full appreciation of the wonderful Gary Wright, who fronted the brilliant Spooky Tooth along with Mike Harrison. Alas it was a perfunctory few sentences in the Real Gone section, omitting how he played keyboards on Without You (Nilsson's version), helped collaborate with George Harrison on *All Things Must Pass*, and was a great collaborator with Mick Jones in Wonderwheel before Mick formed Foreigner. Gary's music will always stay with me – an article on this seminal artist now sadly departed would not go amiss.

Steve Griffin, County Wicklow

What are you going to do when I kick your ass?

Thank you for the article on Bridget St John [MOJO 359]. She really deserves it. As a Kevin Ayers fan since 1970, I was excited to see Bridget, his longtime favourite guest vocalist, listed on the cover. A very interesting feature article and I learned quite a lot, but no Kevin! Bridget St John did fantastic vocals on The Oyster And The Flying Fish on Kevin's *Shooting At The Moon* album (1970). Jolie Madame (recorded November 1970 – released on *Odd Ditties* 1976) is 'her song'.

In October 1970, during the sessions for *Shooting At The Moon*, she made a non-LP single with Kevin, If You've Got Money/Yep, not mentioned in the article. Bridget wrote If You've Got Money. Kevin arranged, produced and he is singing in the backing chorus. Uncredited other musicians are widely held to be David Bedford, Mike Oldfield and Steve Broughton. Yep is written by Kevin and Daevid Allen, arranged by Kevin and David Bedford, and produced by Kevin. Kevin brought Bridget back for a wonderful duet on his swan song *The Unfairground* (2007). Baby Come Home (released as a single) must have been important to them both.

Gunnar Strøm, Volda, Norway

I want you to be real honest

The notion that Rodriguez's *Cold Fact* album may have hastened the demise of apartheid is not so much "arguable", as you suggest [MOJO 360], but rather risible and frankly insulting to the memory of those in the broader democratic movement and their struggle in the 1970s and '80s for a non-racial South Africa. The simple truth is that the overwhelming majority of activists, both black and white, had no idea who Rodriguez was, and if they did, they didn't give a damn one way or the other; they didn't need the album to realise they "should and actually could do something" about injustice. Apartheid was bad enough without the silly mythologising and ludicrous embellishments from those who, frankly, should know better.

Andrew Donaldson, Milton Keynes

For some players, luck itself is an art

I've been a MOJO subscriber from issue one and still have them all plus the supplements. Anyway, the quotes on the letters page [MOJO 360] are from The Band's The Last Waltz – it's the only occasion that I've identified the movie. After 359 blanks, I guess it was time.

Tim Chronnell, Gargrave

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WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET **MOJO**

Music of the Sphere

Behind the scenes of **U2**'s retina-searing Vegas extravaganza-in-a-giant-orb. But where's Larry? Bono and Adam Clayton explain.

FOR ONE OF the most hi-tech rock shows ever staged, it was an ironically lo-tech thing to go awry. As the 18,000 audience members at the first night of U2's residency at the Sphere oohed and aahed, enraptured by the morphing artworks on the vast screens above, behind and around the band, some realised that there was something missing from Where The Streets Have No Name – namely, the guitar – and someone – namely, the guitarist.

"Yeah, Edge broke a string," chuckles U2 bassist Adam Clayton a few days later. "The last time he broke a string and disappeared off the stage, it was probably the Hope & Anchor in about 1978. And there were four people in the audience."

U2 have history with hi-tech live premieres at Las Vegas venues. In 1997 it was the debut show of the PopMart tour: a ghastly meltdown of under-rehearsed band crashing into untested AV.

"That was absolutely terrifying," shivers the bassist. "We were breaking the rules of what the technology could do at the time. In many ways the Sphere had all the same jeopardy, if not more."

U2's Sphere show was debuting $2.3 billion-worth of architecture and technology, with the biggest LED screen ever constructed showing specially commissioned video art by Es Devlin, Marco Brambilla, John Gerrard and more, and 167,000 individual speakers delivering a tailored sound mix to every seat. But U2's concern was more basic.

"We didn't know if the building was going to work," says Clayton, bluntly. "There were engineers and builders and plasterers and people wiring stuff up right up to the very last minute."

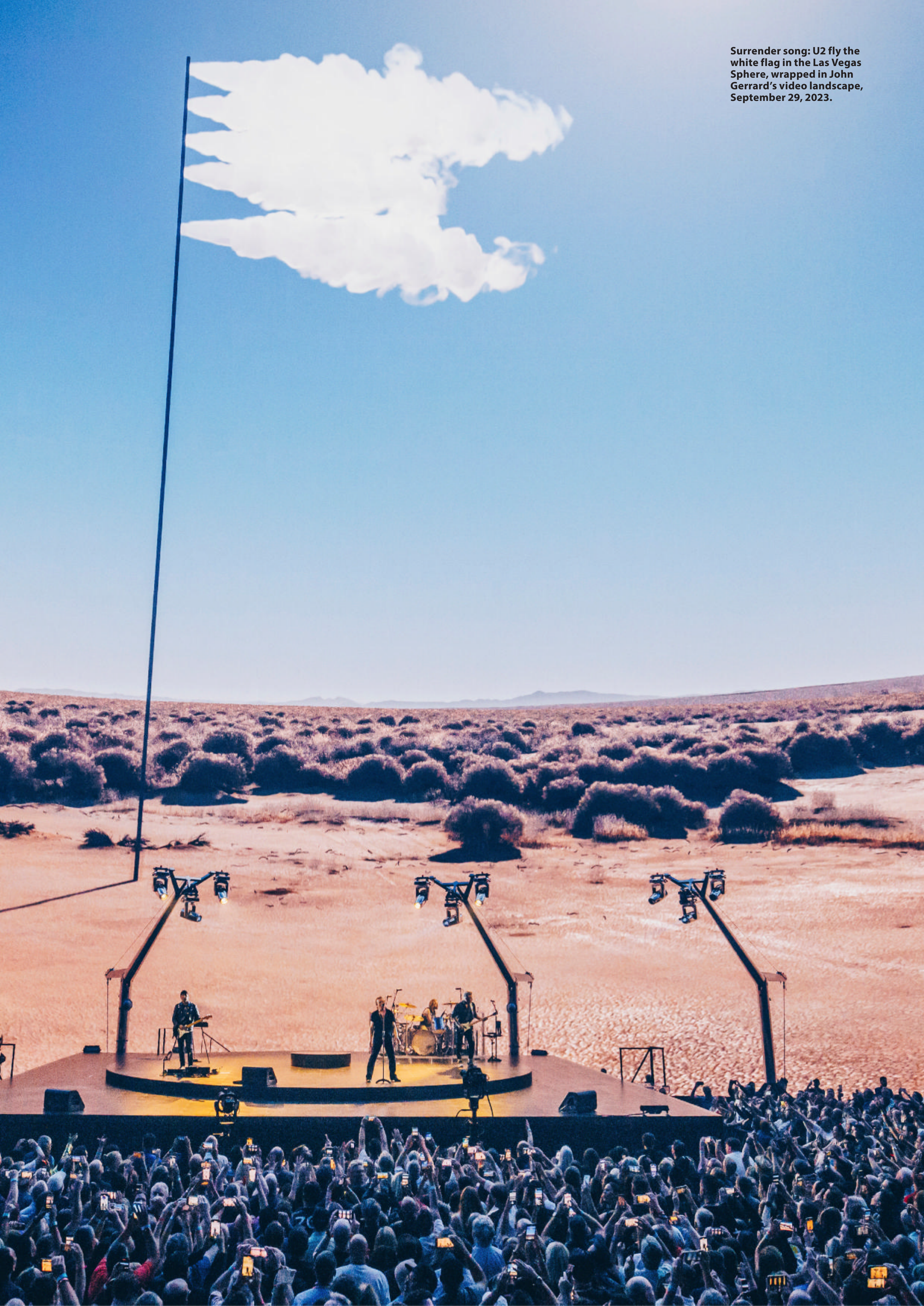
As MOJO can attest and subsequent reviews bore out, the building stayed upright and U2's show – witnessed by a ridiculous roster of showbiz celebrities including Paul McCartney and Flavor Flav – was spectacular. Only a nitpicker would reflect that the sound, albeit pin-sharp, was a tad polite, and that the audience seemed unsure how to respond: to dance, or to gawp? As it happens, that nitpicker is the singer in U2.

"The first night was not as rock'n'roll as it needed to be," concedes Bono. "I mean, I'm relieved that the sound is as great as everyone says, but distortion is part of the language of rock'n'roll. You do need to drive the system a little hard. So we got that the second night. We got a bit more rock'n'roll, but there's more to go."

While U2 have had the opportunity to shape the venue to better serve the needs of live music, the Sphere has been designed principally as an immersive cinema (currently the band are sharing it with a Darren Aronofsky film, specially shot in 18K, called Postcard ➢

> "U2 has always been transgressive in our choices. I remember when playing arenas was against the law."
> **BONO**

Rich Fury



Surrender song: U2 fly the white flag in the Las Vegas Sphere, wrapped in John Gerrard's video landscape, September 29, 2023.

U2's your illusion: (from top) Atomic citizens (from left) The Edge, Adam Clayton, Bono, Larry Mullen Jr; Bono, Edge and Adam on-stage at the Sphere; deputy drummer Bram van den Berg.

◄ From Earth). Still, three weeks and 11 shows later, U2 were apparently making good on Bono's pledge, pushing the sound hard enough for it to fall over in the first half of the show. And, yes, on the third night, Edge broke another string. "So there's something wrong with that guitar," smirks Clayton. "I think he needs a new one."

U2:UV ACHTUNG BABY Live At The Sphere, to give the band's residency its full, unwieldy title, has a lot to do. Not only to break in a brand new venue, but also to honour U2's seventh studio album by playing all its songs, albeit not in order and with breaks for more fan favourites.

More daunting still, U2 are baptising a new member of the band: Dutch drummer Bram van den Berg, best known (ie, not very known) for his work in the band Krezip. Van den Berg, replacing U2 founder Larry Mullen Jr – still recovering from surgery for a recalcitrant neck issue – has impressed U2 with his wit and precision, but it's still been tough for the band to look back and not see Mullen on the riser, driving them on.

"It's beyond the beyond of 'tough'," says Bono. "It was the late '70s, the last time we played without Larry. I think a motorcycle fell on his foot, and he couldn't play, and we had a drummer called Eric [Briggs]. That wasn't a great feeling, but Eric was very good-looking and Larry hurried back – he hopped behind the kit! But it's not just that, you know, it's a *psychic force* that Larry brings."

Mullen played on the new U2 single, the Blondie-ish Atomic City, effectively the theme song to U2's Sphere residency.

"We recorded it in Sound City [in LA] at Edge's suggestion," says Bono. "Larry was so excited to play there, and wanted to see if he could do it. And he played for far longer than he'd planned over the next few days. And I think if you look at the video, you can see his back is in pain."

The Atomic City video was shot in the streets of Las Vegas, a city with significance for U2 since they made the promo for I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For in the neon-brilliant Fremont district in April 1987. Vegas is no longer where music careers go to cash in their chips; it's an option for artists in their prime (eg, Adele), especially now revenue streams have dwindled, but is it a place U2 really want to cosy up to? They'll be boosting for Vegas and the Sphere until February 2024, maybe longer.

"I'm not blind to the darkness, you know, at the root of some of the dealings here," says Bono. "But I think the city is more honest about its sins than most others. Everything that goes on in Las Vegas is going on in every other city, but it's just very honest and upfront, and that can be offensive to people."

You can see how Bono might identify. He says he's fascinated by the Vegas mythology of Elvis and Sinatra ("These are important people in my life") and the architecture: "It looks like it's been designed by children!" he laughs. "You know, 'We'll have pyramids!'" He even recommends a book about it: Learning From Las Vegas (1972) by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour. But he's also aware of the optics. Vegas is vulgar and the Sphere is owned by Madison Square Garden Sports and Entertainment. MSG's boss is the Trump-backing James Dolan – not the only hated sports team owner in the US (he controls the Knicks basketball team and the Rangers ice hockey franchise) but perhaps the only one using facial recognition software to identify ticket holders who have criticised him and have them booted out of his venues.

Dealing with the likes of Dolan is the price that U2, among other artists (My Morning Jacket appear at MSG this month; Interpol next), pay to play live to their fans. In U2's case, the bonus is they get to play with the newest and most lavishly appointed train set in the concert business.

"Here's a character who builds this temple to the arts," says Bono of Dolan, "with the sound of a concert hall. It's like the Met! But I know what you're getting at. Did I have to talk the rest of the band into it? Yes. But U2 has always been transgressive in our choices. I remember when playing arenas was against the law as laid down by whatever the music theory of the time was, but you've got to keep the magic carpet ride going."

AMONG THE MOST APPEALING aspects of U2's Sphere show – one not so apparent in pictures – is how close the audience feels they are to the band.

"It is actually a very intimate venue," says Willie Williams, U2's tour designer since

> **"Starting work on new songs is somewhat tied to Larry's situation. Could he commit to an album project? I don't know."**
> **ADAM CLAYTON**

Sam Jones, Rich Fury (4), Getty

City of blinding light: (main) U2 on-stage at the Sphere, beneath video artist Es Devlin's Nevada Ark; (right) a god's eye view from night two of the band's Sphere residency.

1981. "It's like a giant version of Hammersmith Palais. On the floor it *really* is like Hammersmith because it's got that sideways feel to it."

But are Spheres the future of live music? As MOJO went to press, MSG had yet to announce a roll-out in any other city. Plans to build a Sphere in London's Olympic Park has so far fallen foul of light pollution objections. There's also the issue of the venue's energy use. "I made sure that we weren't going to be working in the Eco Death Star," says Williams, and the bumf that MOJO has seen claims that the Vegas Sphere utilises "the highest amount of dedicated solar power available", but more detail has yet to materialise.

It's also questionable how another band could exploit the Sphere's potential as successfully. As Willie Williams notes, U2 had months in the venue to bed in and set up – a luxury none of their successors will enjoy. Williams, Clayton and Bono all point out what gig-goers have learned to live with: that sports arenas and stadia are sub-optimal for live music ("The wind blows," says Bono, "and you're fucked"). But Clayton is still not sure that rock bands are the Sphere's natural clientele.

"I think it'll suit performers who don't need a lot of kit on-stage, who can create a film that they become the soundtrack to," he says. "Hip-hop is poised to really take advantage."

On the other hand, the Sphere has worked for U2. It's propelled them to the top of the news agenda and put wind in their sails. You can tell, because they're talking up a new album, with a bag of song ideas to pursue. Although, as Clayton notes, "starting work on new songs is somewhat tied to Larry's situation. Could he commit to an album project? I don't know."

What sort of album can we expect?

"I announced it, without discussion, as 'an unreasonable guitar record'," says Bono. "And Edge called me up and goes, 'How unreasonable?' And I said, As unreasonable as you're ready to take it.

"I don't think the world is waiting on the next U2 album," he adds. "I think we have to give them a reason to be interested in it. I just want to write great tunes, because that's where U2 started – with big choruses, clear ideas. And let's go back there, but do it with some petrol and some matches."

Danny Eccleston

Rich Fury, Allstar Collection, Getty, Alamy

Flying into trouble: (above) U2 open PopMart in Las Vegas, April 25, 1997; (right) Bono on ZooTV, Birmingham NEC, June 1, 1992.

Peace piece

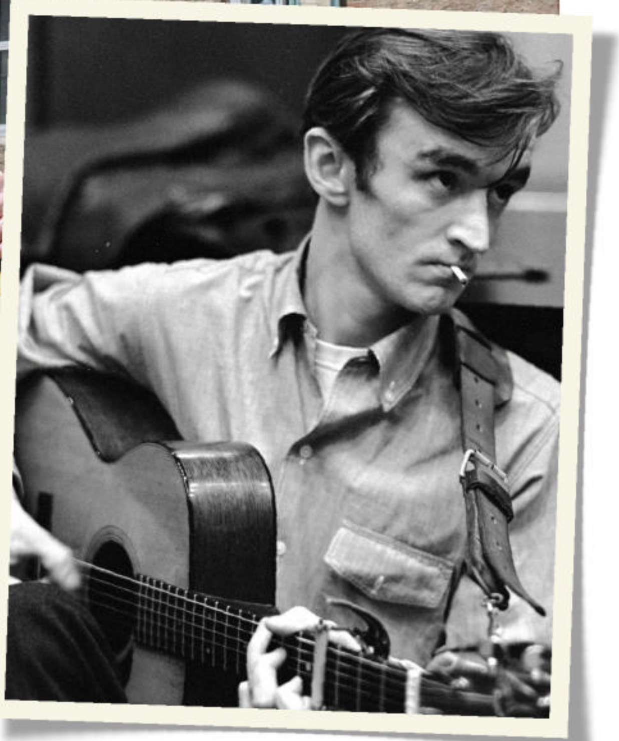
How digital artist John Gerrard flags U2 present and past.

THE STRONGEST VISUALS in U2's Sphere show are John Gerrard's variations on a single flag – a flag made out of fire, a flag made out of vapour – against a stark desert landscape, for Until The End Of The World and Where The Streets Have No Name. Amid the bleeding-edge tech it's a return to the single white flag that Bono waved on-stage during U2's War tour in 1983 (*above*).

"There was some mockery of this idea, you know, the white flag," says Bono of its inception. "And I had a narrative to go with it because the tricolour in Ireland had been so divisive at the time. But it's probably the most powerful symbol associated with our band. In fact, if you look at footage of Live Aid you'll see a lot of white flags and those were our fans. It's the 'surrender' principle that's always meant a lot to us and went through to my memoir."

Gerrard's flag pieces are built in a computer game environment before they're displayed, movingly, on the Sphere's wraparound screens. The 'vapour flag', entitled Surrender (Flag), is the one that most closely evokes U2's historical iconography.

"I think it's a hopeful symbol," says Bono. "But it's a *mist*. It's not solid, the hope. But it's prayerful, I think."



Revel yells: (main) Martin Carthy in happy communion with his current balladeering tour mate Jon Wilks; (above) “Got a light?” Carthy in the studio in 1969, backing Nadia Cattouse.

AFTER THREE YEARS, FOLK GIANT MARTIN CARTHY RETURNS TO THE STAGE

WAITING IN for someone to collect a broken washing machine from outside his house in Robin Hood’s Bay, North Yorkshire, Martin Carthy is talking about his return to live performance after a three-year hiatus. “I’m going round with a fellow called Jon Wilks,” the 82-year-old tells MOJO. “We do lots of talking and occasionally illustrate something with a song, but it’s basically a summary of what I’ve been doing for the last 63 years.”

The pandemic and the death in 2022 of Carthy’s wife and fellow folk revival titan Norma Waterson conspired to keep the master guitarist and interpreter away from his natural habitat. These ‘Remember Me To One Who Lives There’ shows are helping him to regain his stage legs. “I just wanted to be visible again,” he says. “I’ve missed it dreadfully. You lose momentum and that stands for so much. I’ve got to keep singing this stuff to keep it fresh in my mind and keep it alive.”

> **“I’ve missed it dreadfully… I’ve got to keep singing this stuff.”**
> **MARTIN CARTHY**

Few have imbued English traditional songs with quite as much life as Carthy. A Lonnie Donegan-era skiffler who got a taste for the hard stuff, Carthy prospered in the gold rush days of the folk revival. “I just happened to come along at the time when folk music was beginning to raise its head from the ground,” he says. “It was a piece of sheer dumb luck. I was around when clubs started to open by the dozen; I was 18, 19, 20 and that’s how old the audience was.”

Back in the early 1960s, Paul Simon famously borrowed Carthy’s arrangement of Scarborough Fair, while his liberal take on folk and superbly geometric guitar playing impressed Bob Dylan – who in one celebrated incident hacked up a piano with a samurai sword at Carthy’s Haverstock Hill flat. Carthy recorded solo and with future Fairport Convention man Dave Swarbrick, then embraced folk rock with Steeleye Span and as part of the ensemble that recorded Lal and Mike Waterson’s 1972 oddity *Bright Phoebus*.

Inveigled into Humberside’s top singing family The Watersons in the 1970s, more recently Carthy worked with Norma and their daughter Eliza Carthy under the name Waterson: Carthy. Although there hasn’t been a solo record for the best part of 20 years, ideas continue to percolate. He has been obsessing over the surprisingly large number of English folk songs about Napoleon, and has vague plans to revisit some favourite ballads, explaining: “You sing a song in public and then it starts to change, and there comes a time when the 25 to 30-year-old has to give way to the 75 to 80-year-old and just say, Maybe it’s time you re-recorded some of this.”

In the meantime, Carthy’s confidence is returning and there are songs to re-learn. “I’ve lost so much repertoire,” he says. One song he has nearly got back is The Famous Flower Of Serving Men, which he recorded definitively on 1972’s *Shearwater*; the next challenge is to re-master the title track of his 1969 collection *Prince Heathen*. “I’m going to get the bastard back, and do it again.”

Jim Wirth

For tour dates see: jonwilks.online

GIMME FIVE… KITCHEN RELATED JAMS

Half Man Half Biscuit

Joy Division Oven Gloves

(PROBE PLUS, 2005)

ACHTUNG BONO
HALF MAN HALF BISCUIT

Where the post-punk colossi and protective thermal hand-wear for use while cooking meet. Life imitated art when the oven gloves featuring the cover of *Unknown Pleasures* were manufactured.

Mr. Fingers

Washing Machine

(TRAX, 1986)

TRAX
MR. FINGERS

A house landmark from Larry Heard which does give the listener the impression of being tumbled about in a fast-moving mechanoid space. Its psychotropic qualities come, he said, from live knob-twiddling of his synth’s arpeggiator.

Hound Dog Taylor

Kitchen Sink Boogie

(ALLIGATOR, 1975)

Hound Dog Taylor

Live in Chicago, the bluesman born with six fingers on each hand cooks up a rocking blues shuffle. He died before this LP’s release, but as he told Alligator records boss Bruce Iglauer, he wanted his funeral to be a party.

Caustic Window

Squidge In The Fridge

(REPHLEX, 1994)

With five white labels of the Caustic Window LP known to exist, here’s early, secret-ID Aphex bringing the squelchy 303, lonesome piano and moody strings. For more icebox jams, see Livin’ In The Fridge by Weird Al and Fridge Dat by Daddy Screw.

The Id

Boil The Kettle, Mother

(RCA VICTOR, 1967)

Session men and enigmatic producer figuratively dump scotch mist in the teapot, crank up the garage-fuzz and let their group subconscious wreck the joint. Crackpot-thesp narration by Jack Good of Oh Boy! fame. May induce bad trips.

Jon Wilks, Getty

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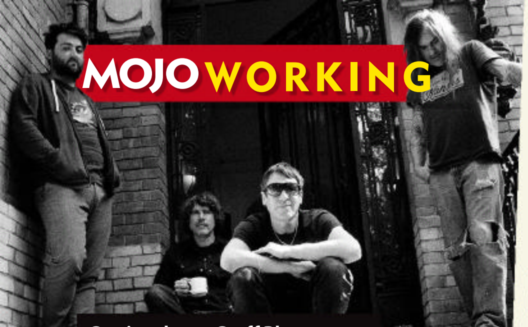

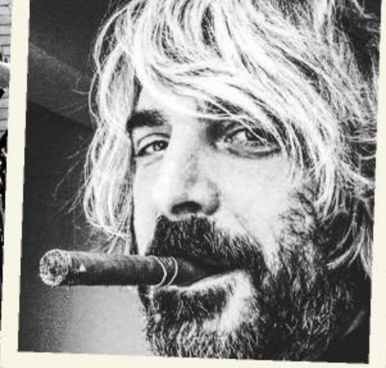

Getting down: Gruff Rhys gets up close to the mike at La Frette Studios, Paris; (above) his band (from left) Huw V Williams, Rhys, Osian Gwynedd and Kliph Scurlock take a tea break; (above right) late tour manager and inspiration Dr Kiko Loiacono.

GRUFF RHYS FINDS HOPE IN THE SADNESS, IN FRANCE

TWO DAYS before Gruff Rhys arrived at La Frette Studios outside Paris in March 2022, noted footballer-philosopher Eric Cantona finished his first solo EP there, I'll Make My Own Heaven. "That," says Gruff, "was exciting."

There was no time to reflect on how, say, the hooligan-kicking Cantona mirrored Cardiff City's boot-happy Robin Friday, who appeared on the sleeve of Super Furry Animals' 1996 single The Man Don't Give A Fuck. Instead, Rhys and his tour-honed band (pianist Osian Gwynedd, double bassist Huw V Williams and ex-Flaming Lips drummer Kliph Scurlock) had an album to make – in three days.

La Frette was an auspicious location for this. Founded in 1980, the studio boasts an embarrassment of vintage recording equipment rescued from the bygone studios of Paris. "The gear's unreal," says Gruff, "like a museum of old synths and keyboards. It's quite a simple record but we fed everything through multiple amplifiers and boxes just in case something worked."

> "It captures a particular long weekend, literally."
> **GRUFF RHYS**

They recorded fast with engineer Maxime Kosinetz, who Rhys first met in Algeria in 2020 when working with desert rockers Imarhan. "I was interested in how we could put the vocals front and centre," says the singer. "French pop is full of whispered vocals really up close, and a lot of the songs on this record had that approach."

There were other compensations at La Frette: "I've done a lot of records on like, one Pot Noodle a day," he says, "whereas here we were all stopping for healthy meals. They've had the same person cooking there for 30 years. Pretty amazing." As they ate, owner Olivier Bloch Lainé told tales of working with Brigitte Fontaine and Jean-Claude Vannier.

Another important presence was old friend and tour manager Dr Kiko Loiacono. "Sometimes when people are making a record, they've got a particular listener in mind," says Gruff. "We had that in a very literal sense with Kiko. We'd been with him in the van, and then he was like physically in the room when we were playing the record, he was my audience and a soundboard for whether the lyrics were working or not. He'd walk in at the wrong moments, making a racket looking for a cable for his laptop, or something – that was kind of part of the record. It was a particular period, you know… it captures a particular long weekend, literally."

In July '22, strings were added in a scout hut in north Cardiff with a quartet from BBC National Orchestra Of Wales (the session lasted seven hours and involved a humble sandwich for dinner). Back in France, Paris resident Kate Stables of This Is The Kit added backing vocals to two songs; mixing followed in Marseilles and final mastering was done back at La Frette, the process winding up in December 2022. Its title: *Sadness Sets Me Free*.

Kiko died unexpectedly in November 2022. "I was trying to finish up the overdubs when Kiko died," says Gruff. "He'll never get to hear the finished album. We were so pissed off at the time with him, then we were going through the tapes looking for him. He was a larger-than-life character and he loved and lived for music. He left a deep imprint on this record."

Ian Harrison

FACT SHEET

Title: *Sadness Sets Me Free*

Due: late January 2024

Songs: Bad Friend/Silver Lining (Lead Balloons)/I Tendered My Resignation/I'll Keep Singing

The Buzz: "I feel like sometimes it's a cop-out to make miserable music, but it seemed like it was the appropriate way to go… it's just about the songs, being comfortable in your misery. I'm quite an optimistic person, but this wasn't the record to do that."

Gruff Rhys

ALSO WORKING

…**IDLES**' (right) fifth LP, *Tangk*, arrives in February. Co-produced by **Nigel Godrich**, guests include **James Murphy** and **Nancy Whang** from **LCD Soundsystem** …**THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN** have a new LP in waiting, recorded at York's Crooked Room studio. Brown revealed he's been singing while leaning against trees: "all sorts of strange melodies and things come in… I feel at one with the trees when I'm singing with them" …**THE LIBERTINES** fourth LP, *All Quiet On The Eastern Esplanade*, arrives next March. "I feel like we've completed a cycle of some kind as a band," says **Pete Doherty** …**Steve Ellis**, singer in **LOVE AFFAIR**, recently declared to Great Yarmouth's Harbour Radio, "I've got an album on the go." Salford blues guitar veteran **Norman Beaker** guests …**BILL RYDER-JONES**'s *Iechyd Da* arrives in January. Meaning "good health" in Welsh, he explains, "it's meant to be positive… as ever it's me bitching about my life in real time." Expect "kids choirs and tender strings [and] re-contextualised disco samples" on songs including How Beautiful I Am, It's Today Again and …And The Sea …images of **Thom Yorke**/**Jonny Greenwood**/**Tom Skinner** project **THE SMILE** in Abbey Road appeared online in early October… **YARD ACT**'s second LP, *Where's My Utopia*, arrives in March. Songs include Fizzy Fish, Blackpool Illuminations and When The Laughter Stops, which features **Katy J Pearson** …**DEE C LEE** (left) has signed to the Acid Jazz label. A new album is in preparation…

Alain Bibal/Dalle (2), Ben Meadows, Getty

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Rhiannon Giddens
You're the One

RHIANNON GIDDENS

You're the One

'Joyous songs of life-affirming energy. Wonderful stuff.' – **Songlines**

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Brad Mehldau plays The Beatles

BRAD MEHLDAU

Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays The Beatles

'A great improvising pianist takes on The Beatles. An inspired set that reveals new ways of hearing pop classics.' – **Mojo**

keep your courage natalie merchant

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CITY of GOLD

MOLLY TUTTLE & GOLDEN HIGHWAY

City of Gold

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SORRY I HAVEN'T CALLED

VAGABON

Sorry I Haven't Called

'Three albums into her career, Vagabon has found a radical new voice. Her latest has taken a turn towards the communal joy and catharsis of the dancefloor.' – **Observer**

NONESUCH.COM

Take it to the bridge: Anohni ponders broken paradigms and breezy soulfulness.

Anohni

The cathartic singer on reuniting The Johnsons, '80s pop fandom and recalling Lou Reed.

WHILE ANOHNI's roots are in New York's early-'90s performance art scene, creating surreal weekly plays as co-founder of cult drag-punk collective Blacklips, she enraptured a wider audience with 2005's *I Am A Bird Now*. Releasing LPs with The Johnsons and solo – among them 2009's *The Crying Light* and 2010's *Swanlights* – the English-born singer-songwriter has also worked with (early champion) Lou Reed, Björk, and disco project Hercules And Love Affair. She recently regrouped her band The Johnsons and in 2023 released *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross*, a Marvin Gaye-influenced record navigating gender, legacy, and life under the threat of extinction.

Can you trace the thread of your early work as a performance artist through to your work now?

What always drew me as a director to performance was constellations. I love constellations of people and seeing them moving in space. I actually did a play in 2019 called She Who Saw Beautiful Things at The Kitchen in New York City. It was a really personal play for me because I did it in honour of one of my main collaborators, Julia Yasuda, who passed away that previous year. I actually didn't appear in it – oftentimes, when I was directing a piece, I'd actually rather not be in it because the pleasure for me was actually to watch it. I love to do the lights and the sound. My favourite seat in the house is in the tech booth.

> **"My favourite seat in the house is in the tech booth."**
> **ANOHNI**

You re-formed The Johnsons for *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross* – what does collaboration mean to you now?

Working in a studio with [co-producer and James Blunt, Duffy et al collaborator] Jimmy Hogarth was very intimate and very rewarding. It was a relief, such a relief, to write with someone else. It's like call and response, so when another musician plays something it will bring out a response in you that you never would have had. I remember thinking that so intensely with Drone Bomb Me [from 2016's *Hopelessness*], that song I did with Hudson Mohawke, because that track is something I could never have imagined. It's the same with Jimmy – he has a little bit of a Lou Reed-ish hand when he plays the guitar and he just brings out an openness, a breezy kind of soulfulness that changes my approach to singing as well.

You've acknowledged the importance of '80s pop stars – Marc Almond, Boy George, Alison Moyet – to you. Were you a Smash Hits reader by any chance?

I loved all that stuff, Number One and Smash Hits. I got them all land-mailed to me in California. I would find out about everything about four months after it happened. I was obsessed. Those were like my lifelines, because they were the only place I was seeing a reflection of me in society.

Marc Almond told MOJO that he was going through his archive and "making a big bonfire of my life, so when I go, I'll leave nothing but what I've approved." He said you agreed with him. Why?

We chatted about that! It is about authorship of your narrative – this isn't a society that's really geared to hold an artist's narrative in the way that the artist necessarily wishes to lay it out. It's a more extractive transaction. The presumption of entitlement – to technology, to information, to the excavation of oil in the ground, or the posthumous excavation of Nina Simone's mental health – it's all extractive. There's something broken about that paradigm for me. Like the Amy Winehouse film – I had to walk out half way through. It was like a snuff film.

Tell us something you've never told a journalist before.

I'm really visually obsessed. I love photography, I love shape and line and colour and I can fall into a really deep reverie thinking about the visual world. For me, it's more a dancer who led me to drawing, Kazuo Ohno [the Japanese Butoh dancer on the cover of 2009's *The Crying Light*]. That set me free to think not only about my body in space as a performer but also gesture on a page. More and more, I've been moving into thinking of myself as an interdisciplinary artist.

Victoria Segal

Anohni And The Johnsons' My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross is out now on Rough Trade.

ANOHNI EXPRESS

Five Hegarty hot shots.

1 Otis Redding
These Arms Of Mine
(VOLT, 1962)

2 Diamanda Galas
Double-Barrel Prayer
(MUTE, 1988)

3 This Mortal Coil
Song To The Siren
(4AD, 1983)

4 William Basinski
Variations: A Movement In Chrome Primitive (DURTRO, 2004)

5 Nina Simone
I Love My Baby
(PHILIPS, 1967)

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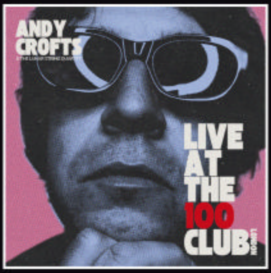

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PRESENTS
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DJ YODA

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CRATERELLUS TUBAEFORMIS

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Rado
For Who The
Bell Tolls For

JONATHAN RADO

FOR WHO THE BELL TOLLS FOR

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MONTAÑERA

A FLOR DE PIEL

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THE LAST RECORDINGS

JOHN DENVER

THE LAST RECORDINGS

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KISHI BASHI

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MERSEY CULTS DEAF SCHOOL CELEBRATE 50 YEARS!

MENTION NAMES including Enrico Cadillac Jnr, Bette Bright and Cliff Hanger, and music heads of a certain vintage will tremble at the knees. Particularly the so-called Deafsters, who follow Scouse legends Deaf School. One of the great should've-been-bigger sagas of the '70s, they play 50th anniversary shows in London and Liverpool in December.

School of art-rock: Deaf School (from left) Clive Langer, Steve Allen and Bette Bright, East Village Arts Club, New York, 2013.

"There's no new album to promote," explains co-lead singer Enrico Cadillac Jnr, AKA Steve Allen. "Fans just seem to need a Deaf School fix. Well, there really was nothing else like us."

To describe the band is to deploy several clichés about art students forming art-rock bands – a riot of satire and pastiche, costumes and make-up. But, crucially, Deaf School also had full commitment to unfettered entertainment, to a hook-driven soundtrack that straddled glam, vaudeville and proto-new wave pop.

The problem was, having been signed to Warners by former Fabs publicist Derek Taylor, their first albums (1976 debut *2nd Honeymoon* and 1977's *Don't Stop The World*) built a fan base but didn't land a breakthrough hit. "Radio One didn't like our name," says guitarist Clive 'Cliff Hanger' Langer. "And our first single What A Way To End It All was about suicide. Too risqué."

"We were uncategorisable too, and probably referenced too many things," adds Allen's vocal foil Bette Bright, born Anne Martin. "Warners didn't know how to market us."

The proliferation of members didn't help. Having met at Liverpool College of Art in 1973, the inaugural line-up at the college's Christmas show numbered 12. "We got the line-up down to a more manageable eight," says Allen. "If eight can ever be manageable! The only rules were: don't be boring, or musos."

Langer: "We wanted interesting characters too, so not the long-haired drummer in loons, but the guy who painted abstract art, and could play drums a bit. It was a punk ethic, before punk."

Yet punk proved to be their nemesis. "When punk kicked off," says a still-rueful Allen, "we hit a brick wall. We had more in common with Roxy Music or Sparks, but we were too late for that, and too early in other respects." He maintains that the first time the Sex Pistols socialised together was a Deaf School show at west London's Nashville Rooms, adding, "Malcolm McLaren called us 'The right band at the wrong time.'" After Warners forced US producer Mutt Lange on Deaf School for 1978's more aggro *English Boys/Working Girls* album, they agreed to split up.

Most notably, Langer became an in-demand producer, starting with Madness, whose singer Suggs married Martin. The original line-up reunited for a one-off show in 1988, with several stage reunions following. Third lead singer Erik Shark (AKA Sam Davis) died in 2010, but the remaining six continue, with guests including Suggs and Kevin Rowland. "But no surprises this time around," says Langer. "We're playing *2nd Honeymoon* and a few extras."

"The only rules were: don't be boring, or musos."
ENRICO CADILLAC JR

"It's a great story," he concludes. "We never got fed up with each other, and nobody got greedy. Or horrible. It's been a very exciting journey, and we're still having fun."

Martin Aston

Deaf School play the Islington Academy on December 14 and Liverpool Mountford Hall on December 16.

"It was a punk ethic, before punk": Deaf School (from left) Bright, Allen and Langer, CBGB's, New York, 1977.

Courtesy of Mark Adamson, Brian Roberts

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Corinne Bailey Rae

The Leeds soul adventurer adores Björk's **Debut** (One Little Indian, 1993).

I was 14, watching TV late at night, and the video for Björk's Big Time Sensuality came on. It was black and white, and this woman was dancing on the back of a lorry. She had her hair up in a way I'd never seen a white woman wear her hair, and I was really fascinated by this kind of girlish womanhood she had, you know? The model I'd seen for womanhood was, sexy-sexy-time the whole time, divorced from anything to do with childhood. And her voice was exceptional. I'd always loved singing, but around me the singing that had been celebrated was Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, full of all these massively soulful runs, or something straight, like Madonna. And here's Björk, turning words inside out. I remember being in the bathroom and just thinking, What did I just see? Almost like, Is this a way that I could be? It was mind blowing.

So I got a taped copy of *Debut*. I'd listen to it on my Aiwa stereo. I loved that it was weird – it runs from being super sophisticated through to her own kind of punk, classical, Icelandic horn arrangements. There was stuff I could really relate to as a teenager: on There's More To Life Than This she's in a club and she's in the bathroom. There's no rule book, like she's just walking around with a microphone, having this great time. There's no genre – the genre is Björk. I was looking for something like that in my life, because I felt myself to be weird in all these different ways. It said: you're allowed to be how you want to be. It's 30 years old but it's still such a fresh and ground-breaking record.

I have met Björk. I wanted to talk to her but I was aware she was DJing. I remember trying, "I REALLY LIKE YOU…" I got to bawl it, over some loud music!

As told to Ian Harrison

Black Rainbows is out now on Black Rainbows Music/Thirty Tigers.

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Fully charged: Heatmiser (clockwise from top left) Tony Lash, Elliott Smith, Neil Gust and Brandt Peterson, 1992.

COME ON DOWN, ELLIOTT SMITH'S FORMER BAND HEATMISER

"WHEN HEATMISER fell apart," admits co-singer/writer/guitarist Neil Gust, "it was hard to take. I thought, We couldn't have been any good. But when I heard these new mixes of our first demos – which I'd completely forgotten about – I heard an explosive chemistry and a tremendously infectious momentum. We were *awesome*."

Those 1992 demos form part of new rarities collection *The Music Of Heatmiser*. Released on Jack White's Third Man Records, it's bold evidence of the Portland, Oregon quartet's heady conflagration of garage rock and post-hardcore, equal parts Pixies, The Replacements and Fugazi. The real reason they imploded in 1997, as Gust is all too aware, was his fellow co-founder Elliott Smith's parallel solo career. "We all believed solo Elliott and Heatmiser could co-exist," says Gust, "but it didn't work out that way."

The pair first met at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1987, quickly bonding over shared obsessions: playing guitar, Elvis Costello's *Blood & Chocolate* and *King Of America* LPs, AC/DC and R.E.M. Their first band, Swimming Jesus, was an acoustic duo, "but we turned to rock with all the excitement of playing in a full band," says Gust.

Adopting the villain's name from the 1974 kids film The Year Without A Santa Claus, Heatmiser gelled after the pair relocated to Smith's hometown of Portland, adding drummer Tony Lash (formerly of Smith's high school band Stranger Than Fiction) and bassist Brandt Peterson. Given Smith's subsequent signature ballads, it's still shocking just how much Heatmiser sizzled. "We didn't set out to be hard rock," says Gust. "But Pixies had a huge impact on everybody. And we had a lot of pent-up energy to expend."

Unfortunately, there was negative energy too, the kind that festered. "Elliott was increasingly unhappy about his 'rock' voice, and he wanted more control over his songs," says Lash, "but he struggled to say what he wanted. Eventually, the conflict wasn't worth it any more, and I'd started producing bands, so I left before what became the final tour."

Smith subsequently called Gust to say DreamWorks wanted to sign him, which meant Heatmiser's recently-inked contract with Virgin had to end. "There was no animosity," Gust recalls. "But it was all I had. I took a job hanging Christmas lights."

In 2002, Smith came to see Gust's new band No.2, "and he invited me to his studio, where we started recording together again. But he was too unhealthy to make that work." A year later, Smith, who struggled with addiction, was dead. But 20 years on, with Gust working as a video editor, and Lash now a therapist, *The Music Of Heatmiser* has reignited interest in the once-eclipsed band.

"After Elliott's notoriety having grown so much," says Lash, "it's great to have Heatmiser embraced more widely, and it feels completely different after all these years, because no one seemed to care when we split. I'm super-proud of what we did."

Martin Aston

The Music Of Heatmiser is out now on Third Man Records.

"I thought, We couldn't have been any good… But we were *awesome*."
NEIL GUST

JJ Gonson, Jeremy Balderson

COLD GOLD

Three 'Miser masterstrokes.

Heatmiser
Dead Air
(FRONTIER, 1993)

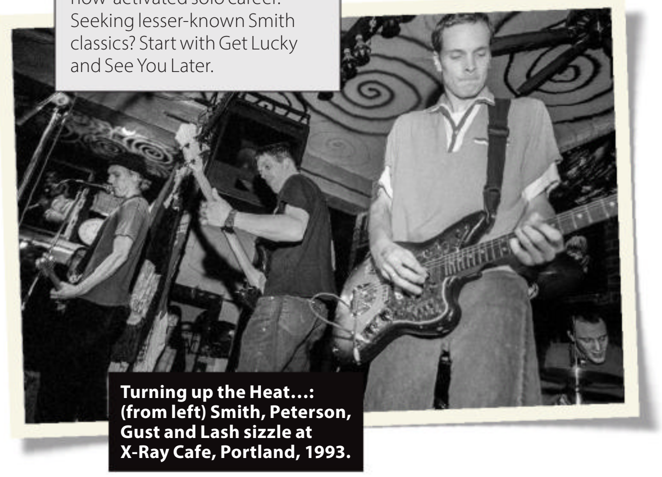
Lash thinks the guitars were "overworked" but Heatmiser's debut remains vital and underappreciated, proof that the best US alt-rock wasn't grunge-shaped, with a more ragged version of Pixies' hooks-meet-power formula. Gust's Bottle Rocket, amongst others, also proved he was Smith's songwriting peer.

Heatmiser
Cop And Speeder
(FRONTIER, 1994)

Responding to *Dead Air*, their second album's tauter, nuanced drama resembles a supercharged R.E.M. on Disappearing Ink and Flame!. Antonio Carlos Jobim, meanwhile, is early evidence of Smith practising the art of restraint.

Heatmiser
Mic City Sons
(CAROLINE, 1996)

With Quasi's Sam Coomes on bass, Heatmiser's farewell was a gorgeous fusion of crunchy and mellow, and dovetailed with Smith's now-activated solo career. Seeking lesser-known Smith classics? Start with Get Lucky and See You Later.



Turning up the Heat…: (from left) Smith, Peterson, Gust and Lash sizzle at X-Ray Cafe, Portland, 1993.

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Sound of *Silver*: Say She She (from left) Nya Brown, Piya Malik, and Sabrina Cunningham make music for your mind and feet.

> “If it was up to me, every song would be a dancefloor banger.”
> **SABRINA CUNNINGHAM**

FREAK OUT! INTRODUCING CHIC NEW DISCODELIC ACTIVISTS SAY SHE SHE!

“THIS IS OUR time to say something.” Piya Malik is reflecting on the state of the world in 2023, of gun control and #metoo and planned parenthood, and how current affairs have energised the New York-based trio Say She She. “We’re talking about things we care about, but we’re not here to shove something down people’s throats.”

A mix of soul, jazz, funk, retro pop and disco, with a helping of Eddie Hazel-like guitar, a soupçon of Minnie Riperton coloratura and plenty of Patti Labelle-esque oomph, over the past 15 months Malik, Sabrina Cunningham and Nya Brown have released two albums and a clutch of singles and toured seemingly without a break. “We’ve been grinding like nobody’s business,” groans Brown as they prepare for a show in Boulder, Colorado, a mere eight hours’ drive from the previous night’s date in Salt Lake City. “It’s weird. We don’t stop, we just keep going, trying to reach as many people as we can. That’s where the joy is.”

“My family in London joke that I’ve seen them more than I have my apartment in New York,” adds expat Malik, who first sang with Brown when they met on the roof at a party in Brooklyn. She and Cunningham then heard each other singing through the floorboards between their apartments on the Lower East Side and invited Brown to join them, taking as their name a pun on *C’est Chic*’s Chic Cheer.

After quickly recording their “dreamy, discodelic” debut *Prism*, the three hooked up with Sergio Rios (guitar/producer), Daniel Hastie (keys), Dale Jennings (bass) and Samual Halterman (drums), a California-based quartet with the souls of Muscle Shoals veterans, for the huge step forward that is *Silver*. “This is a great marriage but we’re still a New York band,” protests Malik.

“We’re all in the same room,” points out Brown. “All seven of us, writing and exploring the song. It’s very much a collaboration.”

“And they come on the road with us,” adds Malik. “So these songs are played the way they were meant to be played, by the people most attached to them.”

With all seven contributing to the writing, *Silver* is a double album that showcases a classic girl-group sound, yet distinguishes Say She She from those who have gone before. There are no glamorous portraits on their sleeves, and no diva hogging the spotlight, just three discrete lead vocalists who can also add heavenly harmonies – “When the three of us interlock, it’s like a fourth voice,” enthuses Cunningham – and lyrics that actually say something. Music for your mind and your feet.

“We’re women and we want to speak about things we care about,” says Malik. “No one has tried to force other songs on us, they’re listening to what we have to say.”

“But if it was up to me, every song would be a dancefloor banger,” laughs Cunningham.

David Hutcheon

Say She She’s Silver is out now on Karma Chief/Colemine.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Rotary Connection, Asha Puthli, Selda Bağcan, The Jackson Sisters
- All three singers are classically trained: Cunningham studied at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester; Brown at Howard University (where she switched to jazz). Malik, meanwhile, had dreams of being an opera singer until vocal nodules put paid to that goal. “Say She She is bringing that operatic flair to funk,” says Cunningham.
- The bulk of 2022’s debut, *Prism*, was recorded in two days with Dap-King Joe Crispiano in Brooklyn; *Silver* was recorded straight to tape at Sergio Rios’s studio, Killion Sound, in North Hollywood.
- Cunningham claims Malik is the wordsmith, “She’ll pen a verse in seconds.” Malik says Cunningham arranges the harmonies: “Far superior to what I could dream of.” Both agree Brown is responsible for the “cool things”.

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- Fortune Teller
- Reeling
- Forget Me Not

Kaelan Barowsky

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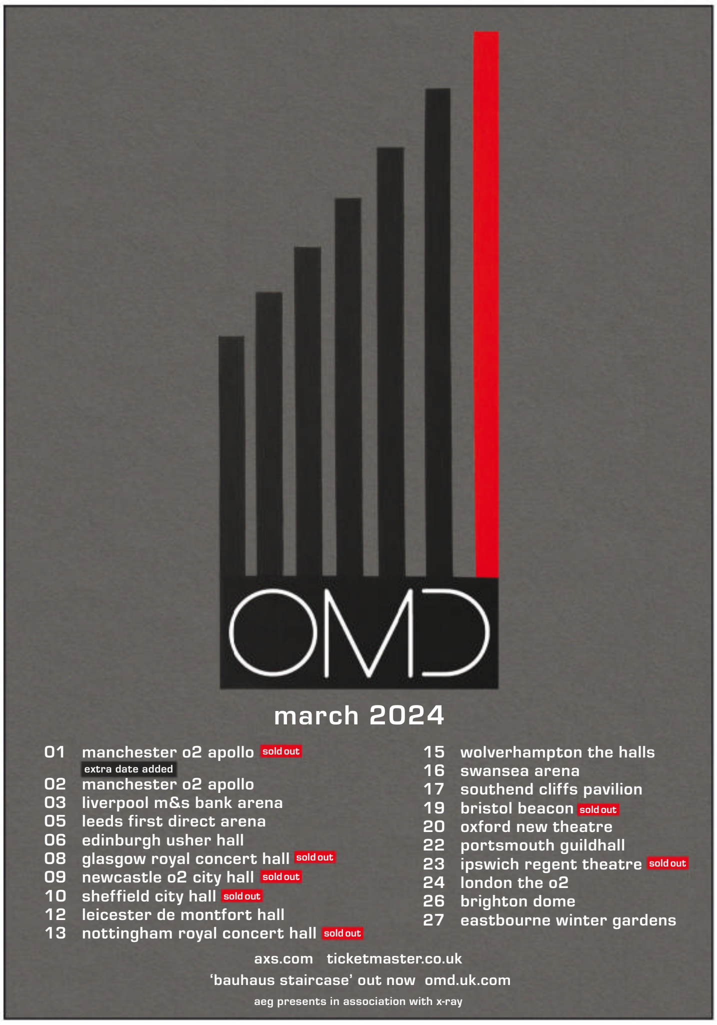

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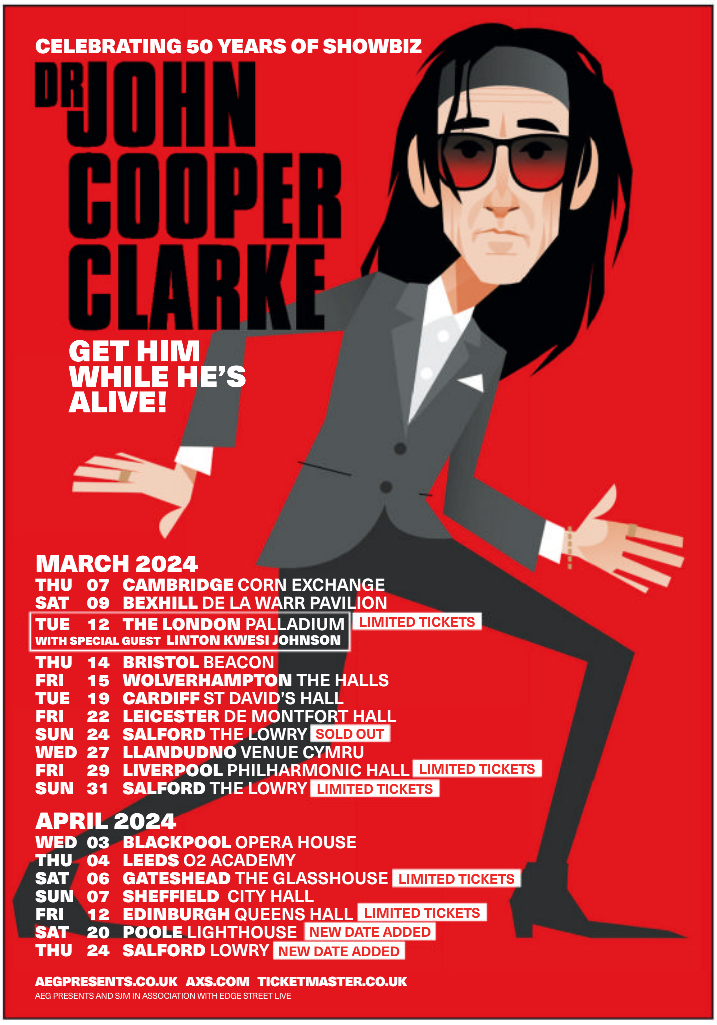

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ROCOCO WORDSMITH HAMISH HAWK GETS HIS CLAWS INTO MORRISSEY

ON TOUR recently, Hamish Hawk woke to find Neil Tennant praising him on social media – in particular his "wistful" track titled Bridget St John. "To have Neil Tennant say that was a delight," says Hawk. "I'm a big fan of his lyrics – the economy, great couplets – and I'd even like to think there might be common ground."

St John herself also passed on goodwill. "She sent a lovely e-mail," says Hawk of the venerable singer/songwriter. "She said the band and I have a productive musical life ahead of us."

Hamish Hawk is the name on the singer's passport. It's now also the name of his band. His lyrics are an exhilarating rococo landslide, citing John Lennon, Varanasi and Christopher Wren. Scottish playwright David Greig, whose work has been performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company, has compared Hawk to both Euripides and Christopher Marlowe.

Hawk was born in 1991 in Edinburgh, his Yorkshire mum working as a midwife, his New Zealander dad a graphic designer. In his early years as a performer, Hawk was a folkish solo singer-songwriter. But for the two LPs released under the name Hamish Hawk – 2021's *Heavy Elevator* and 2023's *Angel Numbers* – it's been a "real band experience", Hawk writing the albums with guitarist Andrew Pearson and drummer Stefan Maurice.

A recent Hamish Hawk press release listed lyrical touchstones: Leonard Cohen, Stephin Merritt, Nick Cave, Biggie Smalls. One name, though, was conspicuous by its absence. The scope and impact of Hamish Hawk songs suggest both The Smiths and solo Morrissey. "I got into The Smiths at the end of university," says Hawk. "I adore their music – the power of Morrissey's voice and the yearning guitar. Morrissey's poetry changed my life, and his solo work has done a lot for me, but I feel he speaks out on things that he maybe doesn't know that much about. I don't [now] identify with him socially, culturally or politically."

A singer Hawk has an ongoing connection with is Bill Callahan. Hawk's song Bill, on *Angel Numbers*, is about Callahan appearing in a dream. "He's a towering figure for me," says Hawk. "He has this quiet profundity which is awe-inspiring. Many of his songs are just transcendent to me."

The way Morrissey and Callahan both feature in Hawk's music is indicative. At first glance it's on a classicist indie-rock trajectory, taking in The Divine Comedy beside The Smiths – but, if so, transcendentally. Hawk's words increasingly occupy their own space, and he says any commonality with Neil Hannon is accidental.

Hamish Hawk's potency is manifest at their live shows – brimming with emotion and a fierce-but-fun eyeballing of individuals in the crowd. "In a small audience it can be quite intense," he laughs. But the shows are getting bigger, heading toward a date in February at Glasgow Barrowland. "Chin-stroking is not what we're looking for," he says. "We want immediate engagement."

Roy Wilkinson

Hamish Hawk's Angel Numbers is out now on Post Electric.

> **"Morrissey's poetry changed my life, but I don't identify with him socially, culturally or politically."**
> **HAMISH HAWK**

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: The Smiths, Pulp, Scott Walker
- To mark Hamish Hawk's 12th birthday his dad burned him a CD, titling the disc Twelve Licks, after the Stones compilation *Forty Licks*. Tracks included Paint It Black and Dylan's Positively 4th Street.
- Hamish Hawk songs are rich in proper nouns. The *Heavy Elevator* album includes references to Caravaggio, Kilner jars, Madonna, Paul The Apostle, Edith Piaf, Jesus, Damascus, Pulp's Common People and the Scottish isle of Tiree.
- The first album Hawk owned was The White Stripes' *Elephant*, a present from his brother. The first time he bought an album himself he bought three on the same day – the debuts from Franz Ferdinand, The Libertines and Kings Of Leon.

KEY TRACKS

- Calls To Tiree
- Money
- The Mauritian Badminton Doubles Champion, 1973

Bird's eye view: Hamish Hawk wants immediate engagement.

Getty

MOJO PLAYLIST

The month's best choppy funk, slow electro and piano hymnals.

1 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & PATTI SCIALFA ADDICTED TO ROMANCE
From rom-com She Came To Me, Bruce'n'Patti sit at the shadowed bar of dreams and float on in the wonder of it all. A relative of Tom Waits' Jersey Girl, which he and The Boss once duetted on?
Find it: *Streaming services*

2 BRITTANY HOWARD WHAT NOW
A full-throttle preview of Howard's second solo album: choppy guitar funk recalling her Alabama Shakes hit, Don't Wanna Fight.
Find it: *YouTube*

3 WOODLEIGH RESEARCH FACILITY GATES OF THE SOUTH
From *Phonox Nights*, the last track Andrew Weatherall recorded with Sabres partner Nina Walsh, is looow-bpm electronic hypnosis for urban interzones.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

4 JULIA HOLTER SUN GIRL
Holter breaks cover with a one-off single of warped tapes, heat haze and abstract R&B, with a hint of Glory, Glory Hallelujah.
Find it: *streaming services*

5 NICK CAVE TO BE FOUND (LIVE)
"A small song" once lost, Cave at the piano in Boston accesses everyday magic.
Find it: *YouTube*

6 KURT VILE ANOTHER GOOD YEAR FOR THE ROSES
In which the eternally languid Vile takes inspiration from Jerry Chesnut's country classic as a pretext to "Get my shit together". As ever, somehow, he does.
Find it: *YouTube*

7 JULIE BYRNE AND LAUGH CRY LAUGH VELOCITY! WHAT ABOUT THE INERTIA?!
Byrne and friends channel an eerie beauty that combines romantic memories with a shiver of primitive dread.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

8 GRANDADDY WATERCOOLER
Jason Lytle's first in six years purports to be a new-fangled cross between bluegrass and synth-pop. In fact, it sounds dreamily like the sequel to 2000's *The Sophtware Slump*.
Find it: *YouTube*

9 AFFECTION PLACE HARRY FABIAN
Lyon's post-punk *revisiteurs* channel late-'70s Magazine – and what do you know, it's Dave Formula on keyboards and production.
Find it: *affectionplace.com*

10 RETT MADISON FLEA MARKET
The LA-based West Virginian's expression of anger and confusion finds the space between Phoebe Bridgers and Diamanda Galás.
Find it: *YouTube*

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DONT PANIC
LONG TIME
DIE
NO SEE

Child of the Holocaust turned **prog rock icon**, the bass (and high tenor) of **Rush** on **tragedy and comedy**, cocaine and cancer, and the **wildest myths about his storied band**. “Fairly obviously, we were never fascists,” sighs Geddy Lee.

Interview by **JAMES McNAIR** • Portrait by **RICHARD SIBBALD**

“SORRY – ONE MOMENT…” WHEN the doorbell sounds at his Toronto home, Geddy Lee briefly disappears, leaving MOJO with his well-stocked library and a painting of his Norwich terriers. Our encounter has been sparked by Lee’s new memoir My Effin’ Life, a work whose zany title helps offset some sobering content. The book is funny, but also moving, occasionally harrowing. The dark sunglasses and low-visored baseball cap Lee wears today are not accoutrements of vanity, MOJO surmises; rather they offer protection during a free-ranging, sometimes emotionally raw conversation which sees Lee choke up more than once.

Born Gershon Eliezer Weinrib, Rush’s singer and bassist was named after his maternal grandfather, a Polish Jew murdered in the Holocaust. Having survived Auschwitz, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen, his parents Moshe and Malka emigrated to Canada, where Lee was born in 1953, soon befriending another scion of Eastern European immigrants, Aleksandar Živojinović, AKA future Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson. With bookish, lyric-writing drummer Neil Peart joining for Rush’s second LP, 1975’s *Fly By Night*, this close-knit, virtuosic power trio bonded around a love of goofball humour and Brit invaders Led Zeppelin, The Who and Cream.

Active from 1968 to 2018, Rush have sold close to 50 million albums. They morphed from Zeppelin wannabes to kimono-wearing prog rock gods, eventually channelling UK new wave acts The Police and Ultravox. Lee’s powerful, high-pitched voice alienated some listeners, and drew hurtful jibes. Much of the mainstream music press shunned Rush for decades, thinking them geeky (right), pompous (wrong), and dully abstemious (very wrong).

The trio’s ever-expanding fan-base remained fiercely loyal, and from the noughties onwards, Rush enjoyed a cultural and critical renaissance. Banger Films’ intimate 2010 profile Rush: Beyond The Lighted Stage captured the loveable, beating heart of Rush and their enduring three-way bromance, while cameos in South Park and US comedy film I Love You, Man broadened their appeal. Soon Rush did the big US talk shows and found themselves inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by superfans Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins. The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada even named a star after Lee: Asteroid 12272 GeddyLee. The geeks had inherited the earth.

Tragedy derailed them; nothing broke their bond. Rush were inactive and their future uncertain for four years when Peart lost his 19-year-old daughter Selena in a car crash, then wife Jackie to cancer. Courageously, they returned with 2002’s *Vapor Trails*, then 2008’s final, core values-reasserting *Clockwork Angels*, bowing out with their R40 North American Tour in 2015. Prior to Peart’s death from brain cancer in January 2020, Lee and Lifeson had kept his illness a secret for three years, as per his wishes. Lee’s memoir relives that dark chapter, and much more besides. “There were growing pains involved,” he says ruefully.

My Effin’ Life is a bit different from your previous book, Geddy Lee’s Big Beautiful Book Of Bass…

➢

WE’RE NOT WORTHY

Steven Wilson salutes the “lead bass” ace.

“A friend at school lent me Rush’s *2112*. I found it odd at first: riff-based rock without the macho posturing and also this sense of architecture and intellect. Geddy’s bass carried a lot of information – the ‘lead bass’ thing. But he never let virtuosity overshadow the song. I’ve always felt his humility.”

Richard Sibbald, Hajo Mueller

Just a tad. My publishers were leaning on me for a memoir, but the idea of wrapping up my life in print seemed odd and premature. Then the pandemic happened after some very difficult years of me dealing with Neil's illness and ultimate passing, and I was sat in lockdown in Toronto with the realisation that a huge part of my life was over. On top of that, my mum, who I was very close with, was suffering from dementia, and would die aged 95. Her struggles affected me deeply, and made me question how long my own grey cells would be in working order, so I got it all down.

Was that cathartic? You'd been in Rush for over 50 years…

Well, I was actually quite depressed because of Neil's struggles and what they had represented. Back in 2014, when Neil first told us he wanted to retire, it was very difficult for me. I didn't react like the friend I thought I was. I was frustrated, a little resentful. I understood all the reasons why he felt he had to say goodbye and spend time with his new family [Peart married second wife Carrie Nuttall in 2001; their daughter Olivia was born in 2009], but I had to do some soul searching. Then when Neil got brain cancer of course I felt like a complete heel, and my resentment dissipated immediately. But I still needed help with various feelings.

Professional help?

Yes, I started talking to a therapist. I've gone down that road a couple of times and find it helpful. And the whole memoir endeavour seemed to be part and parcel of all that. There were some unresolved issues from my childhood – the passing of my father, for example. So it was cathartic for me to review those things. But before I knew it I had over 1,200 pages of manuscript, which should not be imposed upon any human being. My editors trimmed it to a more reasonable 500 pages or so.

What music first blew you away?

Oh, Pretty Woman by Roy Orbison was one of the first songs where I was kind of awestruck. That guitar riff was haunting to me, and it was the first single I ever bought. Then it was For Your Love by The Yardbirds. I was also a big fan of The Supremes.

Your bass playing influences include James Jamerson as well as Paul McCartney and Yes's Chris Squire. Has your funkiness been overlooked?

(*Laughs*) White Canadians aren't funky, dude! But I'd hear these fantastic bass lines on Motown records and years later I discovered many of them were by James Jamerson. Toronto wasn't that far from Detroit – that Motown influence definitely seeped in. Of course, what I chose to play was blues-rock. But I didn't really like 'real' blues – I liked the way you Brits did it and sent it back across the ocean.

Your closest childhood friends were a certain Aleksandar Živojinović, and Oscar Peterson's son Oscar. Outsiders bonding?

Yes. The minute Alex and I sat together at school we started laughing, and we haven't stopped almost 60 years later, which is a fucking rare thing in this world. Oscar was a big loveable guy, always up for a beer or 10. Like Alex and I, he had this demented sense of humour. Oscar and I never once talked about him being black and me being Jewish, but we were very aware of being outsiders.

It was only after your father's death that you learned he had been a musician, and that your mum had insisted he leave his balalaika behind after their liberation from the camps…

When my aunt told me that, I thought, She's just making this shit up. My dad died when I was 12, but he never talked about music to me. My parents had survived the Holocaust and were trying to build new lives in Canada, so I guess he had bigger fish to fry. When I eventually spoke to my mum about it she was very sheepish, though.

Alex has spoken of seeing your mum's concentration camp number on her arm when he was a kid – the shock of that. Was the weight of what your family had experienced a constant presence?

Every child of Holocaust survivors will tell you a different story, but I was fortunate in that my mother wasn't afraid to talk about it. It literally gave me nightmares when she *did* talk about it, but I felt I understood what they had gone through. It didn't make me a kinder teenager, though. I was still desperate to get out of the house and join the circus. It was only years later that I was able to look at her life much more sympathetically and heal any rift between us in those difficult teenage years.

Rush's self-titled 1974 debut was heavily influenced by Led Zeppelin. You saw them in Canada as a kid, right?

It was life-changing. [Rush's first drummer] John Rutsey had seen them on their very first trip to Toronto at this little club called the Rockpile. As soon as the first Zeppelin LP dropped we all bought it and thought, What is this? It had a kinda Humble Pie vibe, but it was broader and the brushstrokes were bolder. We were in ecstasy, jabbering about them non-stop. That fall they came back to Toronto and John, Alex and myself sat in the second row. I didn't think they were beings who walked – they floated onto the stage like gods.

From the outset, you and John Rutsey wanted different things?

John was a real rocker. Into glam and the glam image, and a drummer in the spirit of [Free's] Simon Kirke. Alex and I soon realised our musical differences with John could not be overcome, plus John had legitimate health fears related to his diabetes and it was clear that touring America wasn't on the cards for him. We

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Rush through time: Geddy as it goes.

1 Magic at your fingers: 10-year-old Geddy Lee (right) with younger brother Allan, North York, Canada, 1964.

2 Going through stages: Geddy and Alex Lifeson, May 1977, during Rush's All The World's A Stage Tour.

3 Kimono feel the noise: Rush in April 1977 (from left) Alex Lifeson, Geddy Lee, Neil Peart.

4 Closer to the heart: (from left) Lifeson, Peart and Lee, December 1977.

5 Moog music: Geddy at the cutting edge of synthesizer tech during rehearsals for the Hemispheres Tour, April 1979.

6 In your honour: Lee with fan Dave Grohl at Rush's induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Los Angeles, April 18, 2013.

7 Different waves: Lifeson and Lee on-stage at Rosemont Horizon, Illinois, June 2, 1995.

8 Glittering prizes: Neil Peart and Geddy Lee with Pete Townshend as Rush receive the Canadian Governor General's Performing Arts Award in Ottawa, May 5, 2012.

9 "I'm proud of our unwillingness to compromise": Geddy gives emotional feedback, 1979.

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THE BEATLES
BEATLEMANIA!

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Geddy Lee Archive/My Effin' Life by Geddy Lee (Harper, £30), Getty (8)

were hungry to expand our sound, and he was not. So when Neil walked in to audition that day and blew us away, we knew we had found our fellow traveller.

All three of you were virtuosos…

Alex was always incredibly talented and spontaneously creative. Those big fat Serbian fingers of his meant his guitar strings didn't stand a chance! And they gave him a tone which was not like that of his heroes. Then Neil came in and had a catalytic effect on our creative corpuscles. Neil lifted me up as a bass player. I'd like to think I pushed him too.

Yet your third LP, *Caress Of Steel*, bombed. In your book you tell of playing it to Kiss's Paul Stanley and "the guy who sang Strutter every night" looking perplexed.

Right (*laughs*). I can't look at *Caress Of Steel* as successful, but we had to try a concept record sooner or later. When you're contracted to release two albums a year, you record what you write. And as naive as parts of that record were, some of it is kinda cool and some of it is kinda funny.

Then came 1976's *2112*, the record where you defined your early sound.

Our confidence had been shaken by the response to *Caress Of Steel*, but we knew we wanted to make a great record or die trying. We didn't recognise *2112* as a quantum leap forward when we were making it, though. We didn't have the objectivity to see why it succeeded and *Caress*… failed. But clearly, *2112* was more passionate and cohesive, and had better songs. Career-wise, it saved our bacon.

In 1978, a snarky NME piece by Barry Miles accused Rush – and Neil in particular – of "proto fascism", and pilloried Neil's admiration for Russian-American writer, Ayn Rand.

It's amazing how long that mud stuck. Part of the way we used Rand's inspiration was defiantly anti-totalitarianism, as played out in the sci-fi plot of *2112*. And, fairly obviously, we were never fascists. Thatcherism was rising in Britain. The left were understandably freaked out, and I didn't blame [Miles] for having the belief system he had. But to suggest that *2112* was suckering kids into a right-wing mantra with fascistic overtones was wrong-headed and irresponsible.

> "Every child of Holocaust survivors **will tell you a different story**. It literally gave me nightmares."

Rand arguably aged badly after neo-liberalism's merging with neo-conservatism in the 2000s. Do you regret the connection with her?

Many of the American libertarian dudes that I have very little respect for are Rand devotees, it's true. But I don't regret the connection, no, because I was a 23-year-old kid, and Rand's writing in The Fountainhead really stimulated my brainwaves. Also, no one is the finished product at 23, and we should all reserve the right to disagree with our younger selves.

How did your hard rock peers view Rush? As eccentrics?

They didn't necessarily like our music, but we always got technical respect, even if they weren't going to buy our records and study them. Musically, we were more of an influence on the generation that came after us. Bands like Primus, and the whole Seattle grunge scene. With very few exceptions, we got on well with bands we toured with, especially if they liked a drink. Nazareth drunk us under the table, though!

The received wisdom about Rush was that they weren't druggy. But you dropped purple Owsley microdots in 1969 and got into cocaine in the '80s and '90s. How come we didn't know?

Well it wasn't like Zeppelin. People weren't writing about what happened on the tour bus, so that saved us from prying eyes. We could fuck ourselves up in private.

The book explains why you quit cocaine.

Well, firstly, our touring schedule in those years was insane. We once did 23 one-nighters in a row, all in different cities. Our youthful energy was finite and at some point the cocaine was actually useful. And fun. My buddies would meet me stage-left during the drum solo and we'd do some lines. Then there was a night in Texas where a buddy and I were trying to score coke, and, terribly, we used some fans to acquire some. I couldn't look at myself in the mirror the next day. I could hear my mother's voice: "Nice Jewish boys don't drink beer." Nice Jewish boys don't exploit their fans to score coke, either.

Neil's views on fame and fans were spelt out on Limelight on *Moving Pictures* [1981]: "I can't pretend a stranger is a long-awaited friend." Was there an agreement: you write the lyrics, we'll do the meet and greets?

Yeah. Neil hated all that. In the early days when our meet and greets were after the show, Neil ➢

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Credit in here

The low-end theoretician: Geddy Lee at home in his beautiful world of bass, Toronto, 2023.

Richard Sibbald

> “We weren’t ones **for discussing our intentions**. If we were going **to make a foolish mistake,** that was on us.”

was already gone, cycling to the next gig.

Remarkably, his lyrics for Red Sector A [from 1984’s *Grace Under Pressure*] were partly a portrayal of your family’s experiences in the concentration camps.

Yes. He and I had had a conversation about the day my mum was liberated from Bergen-Belsen. I told Neil how shocked my mum had been when she realised that their world had not been destroyed. She had assumed everyone was dead, that there was no hope. That affected Neil deeply, and I was very appreciative of those lyrics. I could sing them with real heart.

You haven’t had many outsider collaborators, but Aimee Mann sang on Time Stand Still, from 1987’s *Hold Your Fire*.

She was amazing. We were all totally mesmerised, complete goofballs around her. She sang beautifully and trusted us with her voice.

Those late-’80s records were more technology-orientated. What did peers make of Rush hiring Andy Richards [Propaganda, Frankie Goes To Hollywood, Grace Jones] on additional synths?

We weren’t ones for discussing our intentions with management, the record company or anyone else. If we were going to make a foolish mistake, that was on us. Peter Collins [producer of 1985’s *Power Windows*] said, “We’ll work in England – I know some musicians there who’ll bring us right up to date.” We agreed without realising quite what would happen. Andy Richards brought tons of kit with him: the Andy Richards show. Alex was freaked out, but I was intrigued.

You acknowledged the influence of various British new wave bands. What did you want a piece of?

With Ultravox, say, there was a rich musicality there. We were a riffy hard rock band who wanted to learn more about song structure and write better melodies. We wanted to be more compelling and didn’t want to stand still.

But the reduced role for guitar alienated Alex: “I’ll just play what you want me to play,” he said, echoing what George Harrison said to Paul McCartney. Was that the closest Rush came to splitting?

Probably. But I was blind to it. Alex didn’t express his frustrations to me overtly, and I was too up my own ass to hear him anyway. I was in love with what we were doing and feverishly learning from this process. And Neil was *always* for change, always for experimenting. Alex, too – he's one of the great guitar experimenters of all time. But he felt his territory being encroached upon and understandably felt unhappy.

The book is good on how the band took over your lives. You talk about a "dereliction of duty to my wife and son". How did you mend that?

Nancy and I worked hard to rebuild our relationship. Through all our difficulties, we loved our son Jules, who was being victimised by our estrangement. We did therapy and started telling each other how we felt about pretty much every fucking thing (*laughs*). You realise that a successful relationship without an open dialogue is a pipe dream – it's not going to happen.

The pages where you write about Neil losing his daughter are very moving, Neil falling into your arms and saying "You understand!"

It was a deeply terrible loss to witness, and very hard for Alex and I to know what our roles were. We'd visit Neil in London, where he and Jackie were holed up, running from the awful event, and I'd bring in the clown, Alex, who was somehow able to make them laugh. They needed to hear about lives that had not been destroyed.

Then 10 months later Neil lost Jackie to cancer. He said her broken heart was one of the causes.

It was just unbelievable what was being thrown at this guy.

While Rush was on hold, you went to Morocco with Nancy, where you had a chance encounter with Robert Plant…

Yes. He was amazing. Nancy and I arrived at the hotel sweating. We'd been biking with a group of strangers in the Atlas Mountains, hoping none of these lawyers who had a bit of dough were Rush fans. I'm putting the key in our door and there's this guy in the corridor who looks a lot like Robert Plant. Anyway, about half an hour later he introduced himself at dinner and his advice was so heartfelt. Sometimes your heroes are worth meeting. Later, when Page & Plant were playing Toronto, he invited Alex and I along. I told Robert I wasn't ready to be out in public, and he said, "You know, sooner or later you guys will have to get back to your lives." So we went to the show and had a ball.

Meanwhile, Neil was on a 55,000-mile solo motorcycle journey from northern Canada to Belize and back, trying to re-build his "little baby soul". You must have had your doubts about how he might fare?

You couldn't stop him. If Neil wanted to do something, he could impose his will, but you accepted *that* Neil in order to get all the other great things he had to offer. We were deeply worried, but we had a little network of friends keeping watch, mapping his whereabouts: "He was here a couple of days ago, and he seemed OK."

Then Neil met Carrie Nuttall who, in less than a year, would become his second wife. She was clearly a catalyst in Rush regrouping in 2001 after four years away…

We were so happy for him (*chokes up*). He was very damaged by his losses, but she opened the skies for him, and there was a new positivity that made us feel we didn't have to worry. He quit smoking. OK, that didn't last (*laughs*), but Neil was in the best shape of his life. We still didn't know if Rush had a future, then he e-mailed saying it was time for him to seek "gainful employment".

What did it take for Rush to get back on track for 2002's *Vapor Trails*?

It was a year of our lives. At first, we sounded like a bad Rush covers band. We took over a small studio in Toronto and bedded down there. Neil again became the incredible drummer he always was and his lyrics became a different, even more eloquent story. There was a lot of back and forth required between us for me to sing them, but it worked out.

Did you have a new perspective?

We felt like we had nothing to lose any more. We'd been given a second chance and that relaxed us. Even through the darkest times, the bedrock of our friendship was always oddball humour and it started evidencing itself in the bizarre rear-screen projection films we were making for the live shows [which included Lee as kilted Scotsman 'Harry Satchel'], and in the fake chicken rotisserie ovens I had on-stage instead of amp stacks.

GEDDY UP

Three Lee keepers, picked by **James McNair.**

THE CONCEPT COLOSSUS

Rush

★★★★★

2112

(ANTHEM, 1976)

A futuristic sci-fi story wherein individualism and creativity are banned, forcing Alex Lifeson to play guitar in a cave? Could work. Barnstormingly powerful, but largely written acoustically on tour, *2112* showcased Lee's gutsy, high-altitude roar (Lessons; Something For Nothing), was part-influenced by Ayn Rand's dystopian novella Anthem, and heralded Rush's famous 'Starman' logo. Covering the title track 37 years later, Foo Fighters co-opted Rush's kimono-wearing look.

THE NEW WAVEY FAVE

Rush

★★★★★

Moving Pictures

(ANTHEM, 1981)

The Police's influence on Vital Signs was transparent, but it was fan favourite Tom Sawyer which helped *Moving Pictures* reach Number 3 on both sides of the Atlantic, transporting Rush from theatres to arenas. Lee played gob-smacking bass fills on tricky instrumental YYZ and began exploring the lower end of his vocal range. The album that changed everything, bringing more airplay, more respect, and a chance for Rush to re-negotiate their record deal.

A LEE ALONE

Geddy Lee

★★★

My Favourite Headache

(ANTHEM, 2000)

Wild experimentation (multiple bass tracks) met poppier, personal, more conventionally structured songs on a LP helmed by Soundgarden/Pearl Jam drummer Matt Cameron and co-written with close friend/violinist Ben Mink, who had guested on the 1982 Rush classic Losing It. "I couldn't have recorded with Alex at that time – everything was still so tender after Neil's losses," says Lee, "but [*MFH*] was important for my development as a songwriter and producer."

The group's renaissance and wider acceptance really grew from 2010 onwards, partly because of Scot McFadyen and Sam Dunn's 2010 documentary Rush: Beyond The Lighted Stage…

Yes, I think our female fanbase increased a lot. Women could see that we were all family guys, and they liked that.

But you had these health issues: Alex's arthritis and Neil's tendonitis. Given he now had a young daughter, Olivia, was Neil's retirement inevitable?

Probably. Neil was an uncompromising artist in the truest sense. So, not only was he torn every time he left his new family to tour, he also had this lingering fear of letting the side down. Few things scared Neil more than no longer being able to play as well as he could.

When Neil told you about his brain cancer, how did you and Alex cope with the stress of keeping that secret?

We didn't cope. It caused Alex and I serious stress. We got very good at lying. Friends would ask point blank: "I've heard weird things about Neil – is he OK?" You love these people who are asking out of genuine concern, but you've made this unequivocal decision. We had to remain loyal to Neil's wishes.

What are your fondest memories of your final visits with Neil?

It was always better when Alex and I went to LA together. I'd embarrass Alex and Neil would laugh. We had a few good dinners, a couple of good lunches. We'd sit with him in his 'Bubba Cave', this office-slash-garage where he had his prized car collection: his Silver Shadows, his Lamborghinis and Aston Martins. It was his inner sanctum and the three of us would go at it with a few fingers of Macallan.

How was he in spirit?

Often as if there was nothing wrong. And other times not so much. But he did not want to talk about his fucking illness – he would brush it away: "Mustn't grumble!" So three-and-a-half years like that. Sometimes we'd meet other musician friends of his there. Stuart Copeland, for example.

Looking back, what are you most proud of? Rush's music? Or the integrity with which you conducted yourselves?

I have a hard time thinking of myself as someone with integrity. It's not for me to say. I think I'm most proud of our unwillingness to compromise. It was not always in our best interests, but we couldn't help it. I loved that about us.

Did you have to clear a lot of stuff in the book with Alex?

Well, for the first time, I asked him why I briefly got kicked out of the band in 1968, and about why he allowed that to happen. He was very sheepish and did a lot of looking down (*laughs*). Then when I finished the book, the first person I sent it to was Alex. And he wrote me (*suddenly overcome with emotion*)… the most beautiful letter.

2024 is the 50th anniversary of Rush's debut album. Might you and Alex perform together?

I honestly don't know. For a guy who's supposed to be retired I've never been busier in my effin' life. After my book tour, Alex and I are going away on holiday together. I'm sure we'll talk more about it then.

The Z Factor

A rock'n'roll wild man, laureate of LA lowlife, a mass of contradictions, **Warren Zevon** departed 20 years ago, leaving a songbook that serves as a secret handshake among discerning fans. As friends and facilitators including Jackson Browne recall, he was a writer, and a man, who trod a unique, often solitary path. "He never dumbed down for anybody," they tell **Bob Mehr**.

Photograph by **Aaron Rapoport**.

THE UNMISTAKABLE BLAST OF A .44 Magnum pierces the quiet night air of Montecito. One shot, then another, then a third – disquieting noises emanating from the California coastal residence of one Warren Zevon.

It's autumn 1978, and Zevon is at the height of his fame, with a freshly certified gold album and a hit song still lingering on the charts. But on this night, the drink and self-loathing – and the prospect of rehab that his family have been pushing – have him looking to unload his .44 at something or someone.

The gunshots immediately wake Zevon's wife Crystal. Terrified, she cautiously makes her way to the source of the sounds, her husband's back house studio. She arrives and sees the long-barrelled gun at Zevon's side, takes in his blank expression, and then glimpses the target he's just put three big bullet holes through: it's the image of his own face on the cover of his *Excitable Boy* LP.

Some 45 years after his biggest hit, and 20 years since his passing – tragically at the age of 56 from mesothelioma – Warren Zevon remains a fascinating mass of contradictions. A classically trained pianist with a rock'n'roll heart, a brilliant songwriter whose literary tastes ran the gamut from Graham Greene to Mickey Spillane, Zevon was a unique mix of brains and brawn, high art and low culture.

"Once, he opened a show for me," recalls Jackson Browne, Zevon's producer, champion, and close friend, "and I introduced him to the audience as 'The Ernest Hemingway of the 12-string guitar.' Later he corrected me and said, 'No, no – Charles Bronson of the 12-string guitar.'"

Earlier this year, Zevon was nominated for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Though he fell short of induction, it was rare popular recognition for an artist who spent much of his life basking in critical acclaim and cult adoration but experiencing only fleeting commercial success.

➢

Getty/Aaron Rapoport

Back against the wall: Warren Zevon in 1978. "There's so much life in his songs," says friend and collaborator Jackson Browne.

"The people who heard and loved Warren's songs all had this feeling like they were the only ones that got him," says Browne, chuckling. "I know *I* thought that. I'm sure there are people who are just discovering him now who think: I'm the only one who really gets this guy."

WARREN ZEVON'S LIFE began in Chicago, Illinois, on January 24, 1947. He was effectively born into a dichotomy: his mother was the closely guarded daughter of strict Mormons from California; his father a Ukrainian Jew from New York City, a gambler, and gangster twice her age.

Zevon's birth had not been an easy proposition either. His mother had a congenital heart condition; she wasn't even supposed to bear children. "Her family urged her to abort the baby, and she wouldn't do it and she nearly died in childbirth," says Warren's ex-wife and biographer Crystal Zevon. "As a kid, whenever he would misbehave, his grandmother would say, 'You're killing your mother. She almost died having you.' It was a guilt trip that was laid on him throughout his whole life."

Though a gifted pianist as a child – he even managed to win the notice of composer Igor Stravinsky – Zevon was kicked out of his mother's Fresno home as a teen and moved in with his father in Los Angeles. Immersing himself in blues and folk and Dylan, Zevon spent the latter half of the '60s scuffling around the LA music biz, working as a session player and selling the occasional tune, including one – Like The Seasons – that wound up as the B-side of The Turtles' hit Happy Together. He signed to the band's White Whale label, playing as half of a boy/girl duo called lyme & cybelle, and later made ends meet doing commercial work, penning jingles for Gallo Wine and Chevrolet.

Zevon's first shot at a solo career would come in 1969, under the mercurial guidance of Sunset Strip Svengali Kim Fowley. However, Zevon and Fowley fell out during the making of the LP for Imperial. The resulting *Wanted Dead Or Alive* was an odd, psych-flecked affair that promptly flopped. That same year, Zevon fathered a son, Jordan, with actress girlfriend Marilyn 'Tule' Livingston. He would later cut a second album for Imperial, this time with the help of producer Bones Howe, but the project was shelved by the label and never released.

It was around this time that Zevon first crossed paths with rising singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, at the home of Hollywood publicist/producer/scenester Frazier Mohawk.

"At the time, he was still going by Sandy, Sandy Zevon," says Browne. "What I remember most is he sat down and sang Hasten Down The Wind, which was such a fully-formed perfect song that it was remarkable. Everybody was in some stage of development then, but what Warren was writing was very, very developed."

Mixed Headache (3), Henry Diltz (2), Getty

Exciting times: (clockwise from top left) young Warren and his mother Beverly; mixing it up with producer Jackson Browne in the studio, January 20, 1976; end of the pier: Zevon circa 1976; cigarettes and alcohol: (from left) Browne, Waddy Wachtel and Zevon working on *Excitable Boy*, January 15, 1977; Zevon with Phil Everly, who suggested the Werewolves Of London title to Warren; as duo lyme & cybelle (AKA Violet Santangelo) in 1966; (insets, left) 1970 debut *Wanted Dead Or Alive* and 1976's eponymous second; (right) 1978 gold LP *Excitable Boy*.

A year or so later, Zevon and Browne would reconnect after a chance meeting at a restaurant. Over the course of a long evening and many Bloody Marys, Zevon would reveal a cache of new compositions that blew Browne away.

"This night he sang me a dozen songs, and they were incredible. I remember hearing The French Inhaler. I remember hearing Carmelita. Like, really? *'Strung out on heroin on the outskirts of town?'* Nobody – certainly no one in LA at the time – wrote about those kinds of lives.

"The other thing about his songs is they were *memorable*. You could almost sing them back after hearing them once," adds Browne. "The best songs are very vivid, and Warren was that way: he was vivid in everything he wrote and he sang."

WITH HIS SOLO CAREER IN STASIS, ZEVON TOOK a job as pianist/bandleader for the Everly Brothers. It was in that role that he met and hired Robert 'Waddy' Wachtel. The brash, Queens-born guitarist would become one of Zevon's key collaborators and closest friends – though theirs would be a combustible relationship.

"I usually say Warren and I argued about everything except the Stones," laughs Wachtel. "We'd argue and then we would wind up

"The people who loved Warren's songs all had this feeling like they were the only ones that got him." Jackson Browne

crying our eyes out over some country song or trying to outdo each other singing When I Paint My Masterpiece and getting all the lyrics right. We were kindred in that sense; the details of the music mattered so deeply."

Before long, Zevon had broken up with Livingston and begun living with Wachtel's old flame, Crystal Brelsford. But after the Everlys' acrimonious split in 1973 his career prospects looked dim. Without a record deal and only speculative interest in his songs, Zevon and Crystal, now married, left for Spain.

They led a quixotic existence in the Catalonian coastal town of Sitges for a summer, where Zevon became a fixture performing at the Dubliner Bar, run by an American ex-mercenary and soldier of fortune, David Lindell, who would regale Zevon with his various adventures. Playing nightly in the pub, Zevon attained a certain bliss in exile. He was even considering swallowing his pride and signing a record deal with a small Spanish label. Perhaps life as an ex-pat troubadour wouldn't be such a bad fate, after all.

Just at that moment, came a postcard from Jackson Browne: "Warren, too soon to give up. Come home. I'll get you a recording contract. Love, Jackson."

Warren Zevon
Excitable Boy

The vague promise of a record deal was all Zevon needed. "Jackson didn't actually expect us to come rushing back, and he didn't really have anything concrete lined up," says Crystal. "But Warren's tendency was to take things very literally. Plus, Warren trusted Jackson; he knew he'd always championed his music."

Browne had been privately pitching Zevon's songs all over LA. He'd tried to get the Eagles to record a pair for their *Desperado* album and urged the original Byrds to cut some for their 1973 reunion LP, with no success. Finally, after considerable prodding on his part, Browne's Asylum label boss David Geffen agreed to give Zevon a deal – under the condition that Browne produce and oversee the project. "I wasn't a producer," says Browne. "But I had made my own records. And I figured, We'll go in there and it'll be cool. Something great will come of it."

By the time Zevon entered Elektra Sound Recorders in the autumn of 1975, his songs had been sharpened to a point. Enriched by a decade of struggle and infused with elements of personal biography, the self-titled *Warren Zevon* delivered finely-etched portraits of the Hol- ➢

Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School Warren Zevon
Warren Zevon
The Envoy
Warren Zevon
Sentimental Hygiene

◄ lywood *demi-monde*: hustlers, gamblers, junkies, rogues and bit players who came alive in Carmelita, The French Inhaler and Desperados Under The Eaves. The album – produced by Browne and coloured by Wachtel's lead guitar work – roped in the top names of the LA scene, with the Eagles' Don Henley and Glenn Frey, Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, The Beach Boys' Carl Wilson, Bonnie Raitt, and J.D. Souther among those contributing.

Released in May 1976, *Warren Zevon* was not a commercial hit, selling a modest 80,000 copies in its initial run. But the album caused a critical stir, with glowing reviews in Time, Newsweek, Rolling Stone and The New York Times hailing the arrival of a major songwriting talent. Linda Ronstadt – then at her height – was among those taking notice, making Hasten Down The Wind the title track to her million-selling 1976 album and covering several more Zevon songs over the next couple years (the timing was fortuitous as Crystal had just given birth to a daughter, Ariel).

With the *Warren Zevon* album, Browne had been careful to hone a first impression of a serious artist. Even though Zevon had already penned some of the *outré* numbers he'd later be celebrated for – including Werewolves Of London and Roland The Headless Thompson Gunner – Browne baulked at including them on the LP. "Jackson said, 'No, these don't belong on the first record, they belong on the second record,'" says Crystal. "It was strategic on his part."

If Browne's tasteful curation had helped define the first Asylum LP, the making of Zevon's second record – and the chaos and success that followed – would take the music and the man to altogether stranger places.

Getty (2), Photo by Virginia Turbett/Redferns/Getty, Alamy

LOOKING BACK NOW, JACKSON BROWNE ADMITS that he wasn't fully aware, perhaps even naïve, about the depths of Zevon's alcoholism. At the time, Browne was in the midst of his own crises, having lost his wife Phyllis Major to suicide in early 1976, and suddenly found himself a single parent caring for his infant son, Ethan. In the wake of this, Browne booked a tour of Europe and had Zevon join him as part of the package. "There were a couple episodes in Europe where it was evident he was drinking way too much," recalls Browne, "and not handling himself in the way that was most advantageous to his career and family life."

"But Warren's problems started way before that," says Wachtel. "Back when we were on the road with the Everly Brothers, he was drinking unbelievable amounts. Sometimes he'd be fine and sometimes be completely horrible, unreachable. To the point you didn't want to reach him. You didn't want to be near him."

In 1977, as they set about making the next Zevon album, Browne's first order of business was to enlist Wachtel as co-producer. "Waddy was so important to the first record, and he had his own very close friendship with Warren," says Browne. "He was a strong component of the arrangements. So I said, We'll do this together."

Wachtel adds that, "Jackson said this thing to me – which he doesn't recall – but he said, 'I need you to do this record with me because Warren won't listen to me any more. He'll listen to you – but after this record he won't listen to you any more either.' Which is exactly what happened."

While Zevon had years of material stockpiled for his Asylum debut, his second album was in need of songs. The album's centrepiece, Accidentally Like A Martyr, was an old pop tune he'd reworked and slowed into a magisterial ballad. But unlike the previous LP, whose 11 tracks were all solely credited to Zevon, six of the nine songs on *Excitable Boy* would be co-writes – with Browne, with Wachtel, and old pals including Roy Marinell (the gleefully ghoulish title track), David Lindell (the surrealist soldier of fortune narrative Roland The Headless Thompson Gunner) and Jorge Calderón (the anti-imperialist tale Veracruz, and the disco groover Nighttime In The Switching Yard). "Warren didn't write with just anybody," says Browne. "There had to be a companionship factor."

The album's hit was born from a suggestion Phil Everly had made a few years earlier that Zevon write a dance number and offered the title of an old 1930s English horror movie, Werewolf Of

Taking it to the stage: (clockwise from top left) Warren Zevon does his best werewolf impression, Philadelphia, 1982; looking dapper in black, circa 1976; keyboard king: Zevon in London, 1980; getting things off his chest: Warren with Jackson Browne and John Belushi backstage, 1977; (insets, from top) the under-performing albums *Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School* (Elektra, 1980) and *The Envoy* (Asylum, 1982); comeback LP *Sentimental Hygiene* (Virgin, 1987), featuring Bob Dylan, Neil Young and the up-and-coming R.E.M.

London, as a start. One night, in a haze of weed and wine, Zevon and Marinell were messing around with the song's riff, when Wachtel, fresh from a gig in England, came in and began throwing out lyrics, including the song's signature "A-woo!" refrain. The trio knocked out Werewolves Of London on the spot. Marinell would also have a hand in Excitable Boy, a shock number about rape and murder wrapped in a snappy pop package.

A stark contrast in subject matter, Tenderness On The Block was inspired by Zevon's newborn daughter Ariel. It was written in the wake of a drunken argument with Crystal, who phoned Browne to come help calm Zevon down.

"I went over to their house because there was a crisis going on," says Browne. "When I got there the crisis was over, so we started drinking and I showed him this idea I had for Tenderness. I wound up going to sleep – I don't want to say I passed out – but when I woke up the song was finished. He'd gathered it up and wrote this great song about his infant daughter. I had a young kid too, so I could relate. But like a lot of [the co-writes] Warren did, it happened in a completely informal and unselfconscious way."

DESPITE THE PROMISING MATERIAL, THE sessions at The Sound Factory in Hollywood were complicated by Zevon's drinking.

"We'd start in the morning, showing up at 11am like respectable boys, and he's coming in completely fucking blind," recalled Wachtel. "I was the one who had to say, Man, this isn't OK," recalls Browne. "He objected to that being pointed out to him – like any alcoholic might.

> "When we were on the road, he was drinking unbelievable amounts. You didn't want to be near him."
> **Waddy Wachtel**

"I told Warren, I am your friend, and I am worried about you," continues Browne. "And what I'm telling you is you can't get this drunk and make a fucking record."

Somehow, even in the midst of the turmoil, the tracks came together. As Wachtel notes, "the only song that really seemed to be problematic was Werewolves." They'd tried cutting it with half a dozen different combinations of musicians, "but it just didn't work. It felt stupid and cute. Then Jorge [Calderón] suggested Mick and John from Fleetwood Mac, and that brought us our rhythm section."

Though Fleetwood and McVie nailed the song's groove instantly, the recording went on for another 50 takes. It was finally Browne who stepped in and called the session, noting that the second take was the keeper. "That's why it was such an amazing collaboration between the three of us," says Wachtel. "Warren and I could both get bent out of shape on our own angle, but then Jackson would come in and be the mediating, logical force."

It would be Wachtel, however, who proved crucial in bringing the album to a successful conclusion. Still short of songs, Zevon had been persuaded by Browne to recycle a couple of older numbers, Frozen Notes and Tule's Blues (which had appeared on *Wanted Dead Or Alive*). However, at a listening session with various invitees, Wachtel noted a less than enthusiastic response to the leftovers: "Half the people there were falling asleep or ready to leave."

The guitarist took charge, challenging Zevon to come up with a pair of new songs to replace them. "I told him, I'm leaving town on tour with Linda Ronstadt for two weeks – when I'm back you gotta have the songs for me."

Zevon headed to Hawaii, where he wrote what would become the album's opening and closing tracks: Johnny Strikes Up The Band and Lawyers, Guns And Money.

"When I got back, Warren said, 'I got 'em!'" recalls Wachtel. "And they were great. I got [drummer] Rick Marotta and [bassist] Kenny Edwards, and we were so tight just coming off the road with Linda, that we cut both tracks in a three-hour date. Once we had those songs, then it was like, OK, *now* we're done with this record."

RELEASED IN JANUARY 1978, *EXCITABLE BOY* would become the biggest album of Zevon's career, hitting Number 8 on the Billboard album charts on its way to going gold. It also spawned his only US Top 40 hit in Werewolves Of London, which peaked at Number 21 that summer.

"We realised Werewolves was a hit as soon as we arrived in New York to start the tour," recalled Crystal. "A limo picked us up from the airport, and it came on the radio. We asked the driver to turn it up and he said, 'Oh that song's been playing all day long.' Wow! Immediately, the record company put us in a nicer hotel, there were flowers and champagne waiting for us, and it became like a whole new world overnight."

No one was more affected than Zevon himself – after a decade of struggle, stardom was finally in his grasp. "There was a change in him," says Crystal. "There was a sense of celebration, but there was also fear. Fear that this all might be fleeting. And the fear was pretty well placed – because that kind of success never happened for him again in that way." ➢

“He had the ability to say so much with so little”: Zevon, LA, December 1979; (below) Warren acolytes Taylor Goldsmith and The War On Drugs’ Adam Granduciel.

As the new fame, old neuroses and alcohol mixed together, Zevon transformed, like the werewolf in his song, into a frightening creature of excess. “He became a wild man on-stage… and off,” says Crystal Zevon. “He was trying to live up to what he’d created. And it wasn’t easy, because it wasn’t always real.”

“I think Warren was a little contrived when it came to the berserk image he was putting forth,” says Jackson Browne. “I thought it was enough that he wrote those songs. I didn’t feel like he needed to live them out. But at the same time, the public finds that entertaining, these tales of excess. Whether you’re talking about Joe Walsh cutting up a hotel room with a chainsaw or Led Zeppelin fishing for sharks out of a hotel room window – this was the rock mythology of the day. And Warren was embracing all that, on a higher literary level maybe, but still. And he is the guy who wrote Excitable Boy and Roland and those songs – so maybe it was just a matter of time before he had to face off with that thing in himself.”

Before the madness escalated and their marriage ended, Crystal recalls a moment where a different fate briefly beckoned. “When Warren got the gold record for *Excitable Boy*, we were playing with the baby on the bed in the middle of the night and he was so happy,” she remembers. “He just said, ‘You know, it’ll never get better than this. Let’s just pack up and go and live in Ohio someplace.’ He was ready to give it all up. And then we realised he was under contract, and you couldn’t just pack up and go.”

The coming years would see Zevon hit rock bottom with his drinking, as family and friends staged an intervention and sent him to rehab (an episode which became the subject of a harrowing 1981 Rolling Stone cover story by his friend Paul Nelson). Zevon’s fragile sobriety would falter in his efforts to follow *Excitable Boy* – 1980’s *Bad Luck Streak In Dancing School* and 1982’s *The Envoy* – which underperformed and led to the end of his contract with Asylum.

After five years in the professional wilderness, Zevon finally got sober for good, and enjoyed a comeback with 1987’s *Sentimental Hygiene* (where he was backed by an up-and-coming R.E.M. and heavyweights including Bob Dylan and Neil Young). Though he would go on to release compelling, often adventurous LPs, Zevon’s commercial fortunes continued to fade. While Browne and Wachtel would occasionally cameo – and Wachtel returned to produce 1991’s *Mr Bad Example* – the team that had been responsible for his best work would never fully reunite.

“One thing that played into our relationship and what happened between us,” says Browne, “was the way the media tended to refer to Warren as my ‘discovery’. That pissed me off, but I’m sure it *really* pissed *him* off.”

“Warren loved Jackson,” says Crystal, “but in some way he… ‘resented’ is not the right word… but he knew it was Jackson who made his career possible. He always felt like he owed Jackson something he could never really repay. Jackson was always gracious no matter how difficult Warren could be. And if Jackson had some life-changing event, Warren would be the first one there. That’s the demonstration of how much he loved him. But it was very complicated.”

JUST AS BROWNE HAD HELPED SECURE ZEVON a record deal in the mid-’70s, he would also midwife the release of Zevon’s late-career classic *Life’ll Kill Ya*. The two had run into each other at a benefit show in the late ’90s. “I hadn’t seen him in a while,” says Browne, “and I’ve always been a little oblivious to how people are doing in terms of their career – that’s my shortcoming.”

Zevon had been without a label for years and was recording music at home. Bowled over by his old friend’s new songs, Browne put in a word with Danny Goldberg, then just launching his Artemis label. “I knew Danny had really great taste, and had worked with Kurt Cobain and Steve Earle,” says Browne. “All I did was just connect them. I just said, How about Warren?”

Released to critical acclaim in 2000, *Life’ll Kill Ya* would mark

Mr Good Example

The Warren Zevon Renaissance is upon us, reports Bob Mehr.

DAWES’ TAYLOR GOLDSMITH is one of a growing legion of young singer-songwriters who’ve become acolytes of Warren Zevon, covering his songs in concert and singing his praises to the press.

“It’s one thing to be a fan of Dylan or Joni or Springsteen,” says Goldsmith. “But when you find another Warren Zevon fan, it’s this other level of communing and connecting. Zevon does that in a way that not all artists do. Loving Zevon is almost a secret handshake.”

“When you find another Warren Zevon fan, it’s almost a secret handshake.”

Dawes’ Taylor Goldsmith

The War On Drugs’ Adam Granduciel is another recent convert to the Church of Zevon.

“He was always in the periphery when I was growing up listening to classic rock radio in Boston,” says Granduciel. “But I didn’t go much deeper, until I moved to LA in 2016. I was living in Hollywood, and I got the bug.

“I dived into *Excitable Boy* and everything after and was blown away,” Granduciel adds. “He had the ability to say so much with so little. And that’s really the goal of any songwriter.”

For Zevon’s son, Jordan, the interest among this new generation of artists has been a gratifying sign that his father’s music has not faded – a realisation further bolstered by Zevon’s nomination to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in early 2023.

“That was a great surprise,” says Jordan, “and then getting as many fan votes as we did was a mind-blowing experience. I did a lot of social media stuff and got to interact with people – which was great, just to see how deeply connected folks still are to dad and his music even 20 years after he’s been gone.”

Although Jordan oversaw a compilation of early Zevon demos called *Preludes* for New West in 2007, and Rhino/Warner released expanded versions of his Asylum LPs in 2008, there have been no major archival releases since. Those efforts may ramp up once again, as Jordan notes the family recently recovered a trove of previously unknown tapes from across Zevon’s career.

“My dad’s version of housekeeping was to put everything in garbage bags and put it in storage,” he says, laughing. “So, we’ve just found all these cassettes, and we’re finally going through each one and digitising them.” Jordan says the possibility of turning that material – along with other unreleased recordings – into a career-spanning box set remains a possibility.

Additionally, Zevon will be the subject of a feature length documentary. Zevon’s former manager Andy Slater, director of 2018’s LA scene doc, Echo In The Canyon, is set to helm the project. “We’re working on that, and still in the early stages of compiling stuff and finding footage,” says Jordan, “but it should be pretty amazing.”

"Need a ride?": (clockwise from main pic) an outtake from the cover shoot for 2002's *My Ride's Here*; (from left) Ariel and Jordan Zevon, with producer Jorge Calderón, picking up the posthumous Grammy for *The Wind*, February 8, 2004; Zevon performing on David Letterman, October 30, 2002; Warren and wife Crystal in the Dubliner bar, Sitges, 1975; (insets) *Mr Bad Example* (1991), *Life'll Kill Ya* (2000), *The Wind* (2003).

"He became a wild man on-stage... and off. He was trying to live up to what he'd created." Crystal Zevon

WARRENZEVON
Mr. Bad Example
WARREN ZEVON
LIFE'LL KILL YA
WARREN ZEVON
The Wind

Zevon's final comeback. He would follow the project with 2002's *My Ride's Here* – a collection of songs penned with noted authors including Hunter S. Thompson and Paul Muldoon. While on tour in support of the record, Zevon began experiencing symptoms of what proved to be mesothelioma, an aggressive cancer of the lung linings likely caused by exposure to asbestos. Given just months to live, Zevon set about recording a farewell LP, *The Wind*. The album – which earned him a pair of Grammys posthumously – would feature an all-star cast of musicians and friends. Conspicuous by his absence, however, was Waddy Wachtel.

"We'd had a falling out," says the guitarist. "He thought I said something to him and held it against me. I finally sent him an e-mail and said, I don't know what you think, but you were always my closest friend."

Already sick, Zevon left Wachtel a "gorgeous voicemail" saying how much his friendship was appreciated. "That made me feel good," says Wachtel. "Still, it broke my heart a little to not have been there with him at the end."

For Browne, the totality of Zevon's journey – his personal struggles, the way he dealt with his professional knocks, and ultimately, his illness – offered a real redemption. "For that, he's my hero," says Browne. "But what I respect most is there in his body of work. No matter what was going in his career, he never dumbed down for anybody. He stayed true to himself. That matters."

With the recent Rock Hall nomination, and a new generation of artists – from Dawes to The War On Drugs (see panel) – championing and performing his songs, Browne believes Zevon's music will continue to grow in stature.

"Warren might be gone, but what he wrote endures and becomes part of how we see the world," says Browne. "When someone is that great, their personality and their work lives on. They live on through what's in their music, the life they pour into it. And there's so much life in Warren's songs." Ⓜ

Getty (5), Henry Diltz, Jenna Jones, courtesy of Mixed Headache

Best of Yep Roc 2023 New Releases

THE NO ONES
MY
best
EVIL
FRIEND
Frode
Arne
SLY
Peter
Scott

THE NO ONES
MY BEST EVIL FRIEND

DADDY LONG LEGS
STREET SERMONS

DADDY LONG LEGS
STREET SERMONS

RUEN BROTHERS
TEN PACES

RUEN BROTHERS
TEN PACES

STEREO
STEEP CANYON RANGERS
morning shift

STEEP CANYON RANGERS
MORNING SHIFT

Whiplash
JOBI RICCIO

JOBI RICCIO
WHIPLASH

JENNY OWEN YOUNGS
AVALANCHE

Yep Roc Records

MOJO / The Best Of 2023

Reuben Bastienne-Lewis, Camera Press/Wattie Cheung, Getty/Beth Gwinn, Antonin Kratchovil, Ellius Grace, Ben Semisch, ©Bleddyn Butcher, ©Blythe Thomas

It was a year of little miracles. A landmark Bob Dylan album came with unexpected bounty. Jaimie Branch's trumpet reached us from the great beyond. Blur remembered how to be Blur. The best concert film ever got better. Folk flexed. Siouxsie Sioux, Ian Hunter and Everything But The Girl rolled back the years. Depeche Mode, The Rolling Stones and Julie Byrne defied the Reaper. The power of music epitomised? You bet your life.

FEATURING:

The 75 Best New Albums, 20 Best Reissues, films and books of the year, over 25 pages. Includes Blur, Talking Heads, Bob Dylan, Lankum, Sly Stone, Paul Weller, Jaimie Branch, Lisa O'Neill, Arooj Aftab, Robert Forster, Fatoumata Diawara, Everything But The Girl, Ian Hunter... and goth!

The 75 Best Albums Of 2023

75 ROBERT FINLEY (ABOVE)
Black Bayou (EASY EYE SOUND)

74 SAY SHE SHE
Silver (KARMA CHIEF/COLEMINE)

73 IRREVERSIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS
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72 MARGO CILKER
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70 ALOGTE OHO & HIS SOUNDS OF JOY
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62 GABRIELS
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61 BAABA MAAL
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60 IGGY POP
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58 LONNIE HOLLEY
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57 JASON ISBELL & THE 400 UNIT
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55 EDDIE CHACON
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54 BLAKE MILLS
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53 KING KRULE
Space Heavy (MATADOR)

52 HAMISH HAWK
Angel Numbers (POST ELECTRIC)

51 ROGÊ
Curyman (DIAMOND WEST)

50

JANA HORN
The Window Is The Dream
(NO QUARTER)

If the Texan singer-songwriter's 2020 debut, *Optimism*, seemed adjacent to acid-folk, this second album provided a clearer angle on her spectral, literary art. *The Window Is The Dream* was no less subtle, but its spare and considered moves emphasised a closer affinity to art-pop than folk tradition: the vocals unforced, uncanny; the guitar lines a precise needlepoint. A candlelit Cate Le Bon, perhaps, or even a Lana Del Rey raised on Smog albums.

Standout track:
The Dream

49

OSEES
Intercepted Message
(IN THE RED)

"A pop record for cruel times," was John Dwyer's sell for his 28th Osees album and, after the gnarly fundamentalist hardcore of 2022's *A Foul Form*, he'd at least reorientated his main band towards new wave. Devo sounded like a core influence on the frenzied synth-punk, as well as echoes of an old Dwyer side-project, Damaged Bug. Also noted: Dwyer's other 2023 wheeze, a percussion improv outfit called Posh Swat.

Standout track:
Goon

48

DEXYS
The Feminine Divine
(100%)

A game of two halves, this first album of new Dexys songs since 2012, as *The Feminine Divine* dramatised Kevin Rowland's changing attitude to women, and his own ideas of masculinity. Side one: punchy, expansive soul-pop, including It's Alright Kevin (Manhood 2023), first attempted in 1993. Side two: a stylistically divisive "saucy, synth-heavy cabaret", said Rowland, that took his penchant for unflinching self-examination to taboo-busting new heights.

Standout track:
I'm Going To Get Free

47

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE
Isn't It Now?
(DOMINO)

Animal Collective's fervid creativity has sometimes felt like sensory overload in the years since 2009 high-water mark *Merriweather Post Pavilion*. But their 12th LP, a more organic production than 2022's remote file-sharing endeavour *Time Skiffs*, found them channelling the iridescent psychedelic ideas into something mellower and more baroque, if no less inventive, as songs emerged out of the disorientating murk and into radiant Beach Boys/motorik hybrids.

Standout track:
Genies Open

46

RICKIE LEE JONES
PIECES OF TREASURE

RICKIE LEE JONES
Pieces Of Treasure
(BMG)

The Duchess Of Coolsville dusted down her old beret and reconnected with her jazz roots on this elegant saunter through the Great American Songbook. Jones's approach to the standards on this, her 15th studio album, was respectful but full of character – check the late-night, scatting loucheness of One For The Road – and framed in classy settings by her original producer Russ Titelman. An exceptional singer, reasserting her canonical bona fides.

Standout track:
Just In Time

45

SUSANNE SUNDFØR
Blómi
(BELLA UNION)

Almost certainly the only album in this list with titles in Old Norse (Blómi meaning "to bloom"), Sundfør's first in six years was a widescreen meditation on family, spanning her linguist/theologian grandfather, Kjell Aartun, to her own daughter. Often ethereal, sometimes folk-inflected, at the heart of *Blómi* was a classical take on the piano ballad, with a gravitas that sat halfway between Kate Bush's *Aerial* and Rufus Wainwright's *Want One*.

Standout track:
Leikara Ljóð

44

IAN HUNTER
DEFIANCE PART 1

IAN HUNTER
Defiance Part 1
(SUN)

"This is what I'm here for/Might as well enjoy it," noted Hunter, a hale 84, on his first album for the equally venerable Sun imprint. *Defiance Part 1* was one of those rare all-star affairs – Ringo, Slash, Billy Gibbons, Jeff Tweedy, Mike Campbell, the late Taylor Hawkins and Jeff Beck – that transcended the sum of its parts. A crunchy reiteration of rock'n'roll's foundational allure, from one who'd been there, done that and, of course, written the book.

Standout track:
I Hate Hate

43

KASSA OVERALL
Animals
(WARP)

Jazz and hip-hop have intersected for decades (see A Tribe Called Quest), but LPs like this and Shabaka Hutchings' Kofi Flexxx project only made the boundaries more porous in 2023. Overall's second solo album united his complex beat expertise as a jazz drummer with his developing chops as a confessional rapper. Guests including Laura Mvula, Vijay Iyer and Danny Brown emphasised the range, but ultimately this was Overall's trip, strikingly frank about his mental health history.

Standout track:
The Lava Is Calm

42

LLOYD COLE
On Pain
(EAR MUSIC)

While a welcome reissue programme in 2023 brought the first three Commotions albums back into circulation, Cole's new music was located in a very different space to those Dylanish ramalams. *On Pain* was rooted in his latterday synth experiments and collaborations with Hans-Joachim Roedelius, to create a pristine electronic pop that was still freighted with the smart, erudite passion that had made his 1980s records so appealing in the first place.

Standout track:
The Idiot

41

I PLAY MY BASS LOUD
GINA BIRCH

GINA BIRCH
I Play My Bass Loud
(THIRD MAN)

Forty-six years after she'd co-founded The Raincoats, painter/video-maker/post-punk pioneer Birch's solo debut was a vigorous low-end manifesto, a celebration of feminist energy and bass moves (Youth co-produced, with heavy reggae accents). The vibes were righteous throughout, as Birch hymned Pussy Riot, denounced stilettos, roped in Thurston Moore for the Breeders-ish anthem Wish I Was You, and corralled five female bassists for the suitably rousing title track.

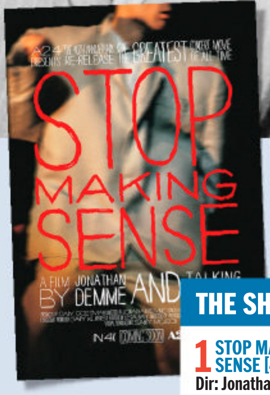
Standout track:
Wish I Was You

Jim Herrington

Music Film Of The Year

Same as it ever was: Talking Heads' Stop Making Sense line-up (clockwise from left) Steve Scales, Jerry Harrison, Ednah Holt, Lynn Mabry, Chris Frantz, Alex Weir, Tina Weymouth, David Byrne, Bernie Worrell.

Courtesy of Sire & Warner Music Group



"It's Like A Conversation"

Jonathan Demme's Stop Making Sense reasserted its greatness, and brought the factions of Talking Heads together, unexpectedly. "It's never looked better," Jerry Harrison tells Martin Aston.

IT WAS ALREADY, possibly, the greatest concert movie of all time, but in 2023 a 4K digital upgrade added bold new dimensions to director Jonathan Demme's simultaneously dense and spacious portrait ("Like an austere orgy," New Yorker critic Pauline Kael suggested) of a tight, taut Talking Heads at their 1983 peak, feeding their love of African pop into a King Sunny Adé-style big-band jamboree. At core, Stop Making Sense remains as much surrealist theatre and architectural design as musical performance, from the drip-fed introduction of band members to the bare-bulb lighting and shadow-play that expanded Hollywood's Pantages Theatre stage. Reflecting on this masterpiece of relentless energy, joy and funky union, Talking Heads multi-instrumentalist Jerry Harrison spoke to MOJO…

Congratulations! The remastered Stop Making Sense is MOJO's Music Film of 2023.

That's terrific. I'm so excited about the re-release, and delighted that you're honouring us that way.

How has the 4K restoration impacted on the original version?

Well, it's never looked better. I'm a fan of analogue but a film print will eventually wear out, and this version won't. I think the colour correction is richer too. And the new mix for the multi-channel systems in cinema is more enveloping and exciting.

It's an extraordinarily physical performance. Has any band ever bounced so much and ran so far?

Everyone is moving, particularly David and the backing singers [Lynn Mabry and Ednah Holt], and when the others are up-front too, we have the freedom to show our personalities, and how involved we are in the music. The interplay between us invites the audience to have fun too, and that's why they dance in the aisles of the theatre. [Director] Jonathan Demme did a wonderful job of introducing each band member as a character, and we see the communication lines between us, the glances and dancing together. It's like a conversation.

Which is your favourite part?

At the end of Once In A Lifetime, the camera moves off David on to Ednah and Lynn, leaning back, with this light shining from below, and Bernie [Worrell, keyboards] is above them, and they're rising, like from a crypt in a horror film. It's a fantastic shot.

Talking of horror, I read that you wanted Stop Making Sense to be an alternative Rocky Horror Picture Show.

We wanted to make a film that you were happy to see over and over, and enjoy on different levels. To see all the detail, but also to dance in the aisles and become part of the party, like Rocky Horror.

Did David's 'big suit' perhaps become too iconic, and overshadow the other visuals, or even the music?

I think the attention paid to it is appropriate; I don't think you lose any sense of the music. It's a spectacular costume change. When David starts dancing and the suit starts moving, it's visually arresting, but also very funny.

> **"WE WANTED TO MAKE A FILM THAT YOU WERE HAPPY TO SEE OVER AND OVER, LIKE ROCKY HORROR."**
>
> **JERRY HARRISON**

THE SHORTLIST

1 **STOP MAKING SENSE [4K]**
Dir: Jonathan Demme

2 **LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING**
Dir: Lisa Cortés

3 **HAVE YOU GOT IT YET? THE STORY OF SYD BARRETT AND PINK FLOYD**
Dir: Roddy Bogawa, Storm Thorgerson

4 **WHAM!**
Dir: Chris Smith

5 **WAYNE SHORTER: ZERO GRAVITY**
Dir: Dorsay Alavi

6 **JOAN BAEZ: I AM A NOISE**
Dir: by Karen O'Connor, Maeve O'Boyle, Miri Navasky

7 **DAVID JOHANSEN: PERSONALITY CRISIS – ONE NIGHT ONLY**
Dir: Martin Scorsese, David Tedeschi

8 **ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS [4K, EXPANDED]**
Dir: D.A. Pennebaker

9 **NOTHING COMPARES [SINEAD O'CONNOR]**
Dir: Kathryn Ferguson

10 **WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED TO BLOOD, SWEAT & TEARS?**
Dir: John Scheinfeld

Stop Making Sense put you at the forefront of live music design; has the gauntlet been picked up enough? You recently saw one of U2's Las Vegas Sphere shows…

The films that have engaged me, like 20 Feet From Stardom, or Muscle Shoals [both 2013] – they're not pure concert films; they're designed to inform you about the charisma and talent of characters behind the scenes who never got any credit. I don't have good feelings about pure concert films, though Jonathan Demme's film about Neil Young [Neil Young: Heart Of Gold, 2006] was good, because Jon had a great feel for music, and Neil is special. The Sphere has many possibilities, but because the screen is behind and above you, it can overwhelm the artist, and the minute you look up, you're not seeing them. But it's another fascinating way to envelop the audience. Talking Heads have always been a very visual band and if we put our minds to it, we could do something interesting.

You said the 4K project has been "a healing process" for the band.

Everyone has said their piece, about what they were unhappy about, but at the time of Stop Making Sense, we were a fully functioning, happy band, and to celebrate one of our peaks was totally appropriate, and not let things that developed later get in the way.

Has there been talk of playing live again?

It's an obvious question, and there have been offers, but no real discussion between the four of us. We're just trying to be in the moment, to celebrate the success of bringing forth this up-to-date version of the film.

What's the best thing you've heard this year?

Jonathan Richman's En La Discoteca Reggaeton [from the Yatasamaroun EP]. Partially because I was involved, but it doesn't sound like anything else, and it has a joyfulness and happiness that I really enjoy, and shows Jonathan stretching and finding new inspiration.

In 2023, **LANKUM** crashed through the boundaries of 'folk' to win thousands of new fans. Also in the van: fellow Irish pathfinders **LISA O'NEILL** and **JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN**. As they tell **JIM WIRTH**, the unexpected attention comes with benefits: "The librarian was like: 'I know who you are.'"

Photography by **ELLIUS GRACE**

THERE MAY NOT BE A FORTUNE to be made in the vanguard of a wave of Irish artists spinning off traditional music into wilder terrain, but Lankum are finding that the success of their fourth LP, *False Lankum*, comes with significant side-benefits.

"I just got to skip the queue to get my library card," says singer Radie Peat as she and bandmates Daragh Lynch and Cormac MacDiarmada meet MOJO in a pub on Dublin's northside, not far from the converted factory building where the band rehearse.

"The librarian was like: 'I know who you are, so you don't need proof of address or ID.'"

"I was in the post office the other day setting up the PO Box for the fucking band," adds the refreshingly sweary Lynch. "And your man who was behind the counter was like: 'Oh, yeah, here. I'll sort that out. Look, go to the top of the next queue. Just ask for me.'"

"If that's all that ever happens from us making music, just bureaucracy getting easier…" says Peat.

"Happy days," says McDiarmada.

Airy sweet and bible black, *False Lankum*'s melding of seafaring songs, gloomy originals, tender ballads and thunderous noise has taken the band of thirty-and-fortysomething multi-instrumentalists to unexpected places.

When they were playing for beer at pub sessions a decade ago, signing on and singing together for fun, it would have been a push for them to imagine that 2023 would find them selling out three nights at Dublin's 1,500-capacity Vicar Street, where past headliners include Ministry, Bob Dylan and Jedward.

Being nominated for this year's Mercury Prize – and playing at the awards ceremony – was an extreme culture shock for a band who were once darlings of the European squat punk scene.

"We felt so out of place," says MacDiarmada.

Lynch, meanwhile, remembers seeing the corporate rock names on the seating plan and thinking: "This is a list of who's going to hell."

LANKUM HAVE BEEN honing their diabolical, folk-toned acoustic racket since Lynch and his older brother Ian started out playing antisocial riffs on traditional songs at Dublin punk gigs. They ➢

Taking a chance: Lisa O'Neill makes powerful, strange and intimate music.

Ellius Grace

Folk explosion: Lankum (from left) Radie Peat, Ian Lynch, Daragh Lynch and Cormac MacDiarmada take their "droney depressing music" to the masses.

The year of living famously: (clockwise from below) the uncategorisable Lankum; the band at September’s Mercury Prize show; on-stage at Vicar Street, Dublin, May 29, 2023; (insets) 2017’s *Between The Earth And Sky* and this year’s *False Lankum*.

Mercury Prize
FREENOW
2023
BBC

LANKUM
FALSE LANKUM

> “IT’S TOO COMPLICATED TO DESCRIBE WHAT IT IS WE’RE TRYING TO DO. THE MUSIC IS THE EXPLANATION.”
>
> **Lankum’s Radie Peat**

< linked up with childhood friends Peat and MacDiarmada – both of whom have a background in Irish traditional music – in time to record 2014’s *Cold Old Fire* (released under the later-regretted band name Lynched), appearing on Jools Holland’s Later… in 2015 as an unsigned act.

Rough Trade picked them up for their first album as Lankum, 2017’s *Between The Earth And Sky*, their deep-bass drones and black metal dynamics gathering storm force on 2019’s gloomy *The Livelong Day*.

False Lankum, though, is a significant escalation, producer John ‘Spud’ Murphy helping to broaden their sound to an ominous acoustic swell – the Incredible String Band of the damned – as they pieced the album together during the Covid lockdown in a Napoleonic War-era Martello Tower overlooking Dublin Bay.

“We were living in extreme circumstances, but also in very intense natural beauty,” says Peat. “We got to see the sea every day.”

“The weather was amazing,” says MacDiarmada.

“Then the room where we made the music in has no windows, so you’d go in there and you’d lose a sense of time,” says Peat.

“Like fucking sensory deprivation,” says Lynch.

False Lankum revels in contrasts; pure horror on their exhumation of the traditional Go Dig My Grave, wistful bewilderment on MacDiarmada’s version of Newcastle, and a more Floyd-ish big-picture *ennui* on Daragh Lynch’s gigantic closer, The Turn. Surprisingly, the most aggressively idiosyncratic record they have made has ended up being a commercial breakthrough.

Whether this represents a sudden upturn in the fortunes of traditional music is a moot point. Lankum have an immense knowledge of folk esoterica, and an affinity for the electrified tradition exemplified by Planxty and Sweeney’s Men, while their force-10 harmonies nod to The Watersons and Swan Arcade. However, there is as much Rudimentary Peni or Sunn O))) in Lankum’s DNA, and the band have largely given up trying to describe what they do.

“If you’re getting a taxi sometimes and the driver is like: ‘Oh, you’re in a band…,’” says Peat, wincing. “‘What kind of music do you play?’” smiles Lynch.

“Sometimes I just lie because I just don’t really know what to say,” says Peat. “And I don’t think they really would like to hear the truth. So I’m like: just indie.”

“It’s droney depressing folk music,” jokes MacDiarmada.

“It’s too complicated to list our influences or try to come up with words that describe what it is that we’re trying to do,” says Peat. “The music is the explanation; the album plus the artwork – that’s what we have to say, that’s what we’re getting at. The only thing that explains it is the actual thing.”

LANKUM’S TASTE FOR THE UNCATEGORISABLE IS shared by some close Dublin contemporaries. Signed to Rough Trade on Lankum’s recommendation, Lisa O’Neill has been much fêted this year for her uncanny fifth LP, *All Of This Is Chance*. An elemental melding of intense lyricism, autumn-toned instrumentation and O’Neill’s storm-lashed voice, key songs like If I Was A Painter, Whisht, The Wild Workings Of The Mind and the transcendent Old Note feel like a horse-drawn approximation of early Patti Smith. This powerful, strange, intimate music drew her an audience of 1,800 for a March show at London’s Barbican.

“It is more than validation,” she tells MOJO, nursing a broken shoulder as we meet her at the James Joyce Centre, a short walk from central Dublin. “You’re met with an understanding and it gives you a strength in your own visions.”

From Ballyhaise in County Cavan, O’Neill moved to the capital as a teenager to study songwriting at Ballyfermot College and had self-released her first two LPs – 2009’s *Lisa O’Neill Has An Album* and 2013’s *Same Cloth Or Not* – before she first ran into the Lynch brothers.

“I remember meeting them at a session up on South Great George’s Street, and then I met Radie maybe 10 years ago,” she remembers, adding forcefully: “I moved here 24 years ago, and I met these people in the folk scene in the last 10 to 15 years. I had a life before that.”

O’Neill found her uncompromising voice while playing Sunday night sessions at the International Bar, on the south side of the River Liffey (“If you were barred from every other pub in Dublin, you

Sorcha Frances Ryder, Getty (4)

Dig the new breed: Lisa O'Neill performing in Barcelona, February 8, 2017; (below) John Francis Flynn on-stage at Curraghmore House, Waterford, Ireland, July 31, 2022.

might be allowed in there," she recalls). She and Lankum have shared interests (O'Neill mixed trad-arrs and originals on 2018's *Heard A Long Gone Song*), but they are – to paraphrase one of O'Neill's songs – birdies from another realm, as indeed is John Francis Flynn, whose second LP, *Look Over The Wall, See The Sky*, offers another cubist take on traditional music.

Avant noise and eerie Tricky paranoia mingle with virtuoso tin whistle, as Flynn rewires old songs – The Zoological Gardens, Ewan MacColl's Dirty Old Town – into a very modern portrait of his home city.

Signed after supporting Lankum on tour, Flynn played sessions alongside O'Neill for years, and is excited by the creative space that his circle have opened up. "It's really heartening for people who really want to experiment," he tells MOJO. "The stuff that Lankum have put out recently, that is really incredibly challenging music.

"We were all playing together in the city for so long and it's a very beautiful thing that everyone's doing so well," he adds. "It's a bit intimidating coming up after them."

HOWEVER, LANKUM'S YEAR has not been an entirely enviable one. For all the set-piece successes – not least: headlining Birmingham's experimental Supersonic festival – autumn live dates in Denmark and America were cancelled, an official statement explaining that it was necessary "to preserve the health and wellbeing of our band members".

Peat's daughter is under two, and juggling Lankum and parenthood has not been easy. "I bring my child on tour with us and it's difficult," she says. "A lot more difficult than you would imagine."

When MOJO show up, Lankum are enjoying a bit of down time. Ian Lynch – whose year has also encompassed side-project One Leg, One Eye and a successful extreme folk podcast, Fire Draw Near – is in America ("on an old-school DIY punk tour" according to his Twitter feed). However, Lankum have shows booked for the winter, while Peat is simultaneously promoting *CYRM*, the glowering debut album from her other band, ØXN.

Plans for the longer term, though, are being kept vague. "Any time we're asked this question, the one thing we all say is that we want to do a soundtrack," says Daragh.

In the meantime, Lankum have blessings to count.

"I'm glad we started doing what we're doing a little bit later in life," says Peat.

"There's less risk of believing your own hype," adds Daragh. "Like swanning around wearing fucking fancy jackets and looking around to see if people know who you are."

"I occasionally try and take a step back," says MacDiarmada. "Because it's amazing to be acknowledged, it really is."

As they finish up their pints and teas and head out onto Prospect Road, Daragh discovers that his bike – chained to a railing outside – has been severely mangled. Reckless Phibsborough bus drivers are blamed, but whatever the damage, Lankum have plenty to feel positive about. Peat goes into a little reverie as she remembers hearing Iggy Pop playing their blood and thunder assault The New York Trader on his BBC Radio 6 Music show.

"And he said, in his Iggy Pop voice, the word 'Lankum'. And I was: THAT IS SO COOL!" she twinkles.

All this and priority treatment at the library. As Peat says with a shrug: "Sometimes you have to just deliberately let your inner child be happy." Ⓜ

BALLADS & BEYOND

Five more voices taking folk into the future.

THE MARY WALLOPERS

A sort of reckless neo-Pogues with a slight King Kurt undertone, Dundalk's Mary Wallopers are a riot of colour (mostly green) live, but the group founded around brothers Andrew and Charles Hendy have hidden depths. There's beer and there's banjos, but 2023 second LP *Irish Rock N Roll* reveals the upstart political conscience beneath the mayhem.

NAIMA BOCK

Once a member of south London punks Goat Girl, Bock ran away to join the folkie fairies, singing trad with the Broadside Hacks collective before releasing her luminous Sub Pop debut *Giant Palm* in 2022: samba-toned dream pop with distant echoes of Fairport Convention. Expect a more stripped-down approach for her next project.

JIM GHEDI

The Sheffield experimentalist graduated into free-form guitar with 2015's *Home Is Where I Exist, Now To Live And Die*. Two albums of John Fahey-style instrumentals with Toby Hay come highly recommended, but his unfettered Son David from 2021's *In The Furrows Of Common Place* better encapsulates his mix of bookish Bert Jansch and hunky James Dean.

SHOVEL DANCE COLLECTIVE

From the same stable as nu-post-rockers Caroline (with whom they share members), the nine-piece Shovel Dance Collective mixed drones, trad material and found sounds on their 2022 debut *The Water Is The Shovel Of The Shore*. Art school kids with a taste for the gothic, they may be Lankum's closest musical relatives outside of Dublin.

ANGELINE MORRISON

Born to a Jamaican mother and a father from the Outer Hebrides, Morrison's 2022 outing *The Sorrow Songs: Folk Songs Of Black British Experience* was an era-defining collection of brilliantly-tooled trad *homages*, telling true stories of the nation's centuries-old black community. When she last spoke to MOJO, she was working on an album about alchemy.

The 75 Best Albums Of 2023

BLUES

Compiled by TONY RUSSELL

1 VARIOUS (ABOVE)
Playing For The Man At The Door: Field Recordings From The Collection Of Mack McCormick 1958–1971 (SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS)

2 D.K. HARRELL
The Right Man (LITTLE VILLAGE)

3 CANDICE IVORY
When The Levee Breaks: The Music Of Memphis Minnie (LITTLE VILLAGE)

4 CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM
Live In London (ALLIGATOR)

5 MICHAEL JEROME BROWNE
Gettin' Together (BOREALIS)

6 ALABAMA MIKE
Stuff I've Been Through (LITTLE VILLAGE)

7 CONNOR SELBY
Connor Selby (PROVOGUE)

8 VARIOUS
Down Home Blues – Chicago Volume 3: The Special Stuff (WIENERWORLD)

9 THE NICK MOSS BAND
Get Your Back Into It! (ALLIGATOR)

10 BUDDY GUY
The Blues Don't Lie (RCA)

UNDERGROUND

Compiled by JOHN MULVEY

1 NATURAL INFORMATION SOCIETY (ABOVE)
Since Time Is Gravity (EREMITE)

2 THE NECKS
Travel (NORTHERN SPY)

3 SETTING
Shone A Rainbow Light On (PARADISE OF BACHELORS)

4 BILL ORCUTT
Jump On It (PALILALIA)

5 CHRIS ABRAHAMS/ OREN AMBARCHI/ ROBBIE AVENAIM
Placelessness (IDEOLOGIC ORGAN)

6 DANIEL BACHMAN
When The Roses Come Again (THREE LOBED)

7 MV & EE
Green Ark (CHILD OF MICROTONES)

8 BCMC
Foreign Smokes (DRAG CITY)

9 ARNOLD DREYBLATT
Resolve (DRAG CITY)

10 GUNN/ TRUSCINSKI/ NACE
Glass Band (THREE LOBED)

credit in here

40

The Tubs
Dead Meat

THE TUBS

Dead Meat

The elevator pitch for this debut album by Welshmen in London The Tubs was a tantalising one: Richard Thompson's withering folk rock aligned to The Feelies' torrential jangle. A great idea, perfectly executed, as these nine tightly wound dispatches from the snarkier, grottier end of capital life rushed along at irresponsible speed; Bob Mould was another clear antecedent. Listen out for some impeccably Linda Thompson-ish harmonies, too.

Standout track: Round The Bend

39

SLOWDIVE

Everything Is Alive

Shoegazers might be suited to playing the long game, but the 21st century vindication of Slowdive, after their first act was snuffed out by Britpop jollity, was still immensely satisfying. *Everything Is Alive* built on the stately glories of 2017's self-titled comeback, recorded in part at the same Oxfordshire studio – Abingdon's Courtyard – where they started in the early '90s. "What guitar effects were used on the album?" MOJO asked Neil Halstead. His response: "All of them."

Standout track: Shanty

38

GAZ COOMBES
TURN THE CAR AROUND

GAZ COOMBES

Turn The Car Around

Like Slowdive, Coombes is another survivor from the Oxford and Reading indie uprising of the early '90s. Unlike them, though, the Supergrass frontman travelled substantially further from his roots in 2023. Supergrass reunions postponed due to the pandemic, Coombes hunkered down to create this rich, artisanal LP of mid-life rock. Edgy funk resembled his Home Counties contemporaries Radiohead; elsewhere, epic balladry placed him on a similar trajectory to Arctic Monkeys.

Standout track: Feel Loop (Lizard Dream)

37

SLEAFORD MODS

UK Grim

"Personally, I've never been happier," Jason Williamson told MOJO, but his herculean annoyance at UK life – "on this melting tyre of depression" – was as pointed as ever on the Mods' 12th electro-punk tirade. Guest appearances from Perry Farrell (So Trendy) and Dry Cleaning's Florence Shaw (Force 10 From Navarone) only added to the endlessly quotable ragefest, Williamson taking aim not just at his rulers, but his "white bloke aggro band" contemporaries.

Standout track: Force 10 From Navarone

36

SHIRLEY COLLINS
ARCHANGEL HILL

SHIRLEY COLLINS

Archangel Hill

The empress of British folk claimed to MOJO that *Archangel Hill* would be her last album, at 87. But given the unexpected nature of her return to recording with 2016's *Lodestar*, promises of retirement may again be premature. That said, *Archangel Hill* worked beautifully as a farewell, Collins revisiting traditional songs she first tackled 50 or 60 years ago, a voice of fathomless experience now poignantly shifting their tone and meanings.

Standout track: Fare Thee Well My Dearest Dear

35

DEPECHE MODE
Memento Mori

DEPECHE MODE

Memento Mori

Out of Andy Fletcher's passing, Dave Gahan and Martin Gore grasped a strange new imperative for Depeche Mode: after over 40 years in a band together, Gahan told us, "We had to find a way of becoming friends." Strengthened by shared grief and renewed purpose, *Memento Mori* became the best Depeche LP in years, a monumental reassertion of core electro-rock values, with cathedral-sized tunes and stainless engineering by 2023's go-to producer, James Ford (Blur).

Standout track: My Favourite Stranger

34

CORINNE BAILEY RAE
BLACK RAINBOWS

CORINNE BAILEY RAE

Black Rainbows

Those who still had the Leeds singer-songwriter pegged as a mainstream pop artist were robustly corrected by her fourth album (and first in seven years), a sprawling and eclectic response to an exhibition on African American history by the artist Theaster Gates. *Black Rainbows* encompassed aquarian soul, cosmic jazz and even Jack White-style punk (New York Transit Queen), knitted together into a whole that felt simultaneously challenging and satisfying.

Standout track: Before The Throne Of The Invisible God

33

SBT

Joan Of All

In a year of auspicious comebacks, the return of American singer-songwriter Sarabeth Tucek – now operating as SBT – was an easy one to miss. But the first album in 12 years from the former Bill Callahan backing vocalist and Dylan support act was a stealth classic. Tucek's a Los Angeles resident, but it was her Manhattan, New York upbringing that often informed the epiphanies of double album *Joan Of All*, its skinny, grimy chugs indebted to Lou Reed.

Standout track: 13th St #1

32

BILL ORCUTT

Jump On It

The San Francisco guitarist and noise-rock vet (once of '90s miscreants Harry Pussy) was placed high in last year's MOJO Underground chart with his heavy minimalism opus, *Music For Four Guitars*. This year, Orcutt cracked the main MOJO chart with this uncharacteristically gentle venture: nine solo acoustic workouts where his avant-garde and improvisational skills were channelled into something less prickly, and even pretty, without losing any of their radical, John Fahey-ish intent.

Standout track: New Germs

31

JAVELIN
SUFJAN STEVENS

SUFJAN STEVENS

Javelin

A tough year for Stevens, as he continues to recover from Guillain-Barré syndrome and learns to walk again, with *Javelin* dedicated to his partner Evans Richardson, who died in April. Stevens' tenth solo LP leaned hard into his singer-songwriter smarts, privileging the chamber-folk of 2015's *Carrie & Lowell* over more conceptual tricksiness. Mostly played and assembled by himself, *Javelin* was nevertheless a many-layered, ineffably moving masterpiece.

Standout track: Will Anybody Ever Love Me?

Smithsonian Institution, Chris Strong

Riot act: Sly Stone in 1974; (right) Stone's co-author Ben Greenman.

Getty

Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)
A Memoir
SLY STONE
WITH BEN GREENMAN

"We Will Hear Some Music Very Soon"

Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin): A Memoir, returned Sly Stone's voice to centre stage. But the process was no cakewalk, finds Danny Eccleston.

LONG RUMOURED, often dismissed as an impossible chimera, Sly Stone's memoir delivered all the wonder, excess and car crash rubbernecking readers could have imagined. Some of it beggared belief: Sly's falling-out with Family Stone bassist Larry Graham that ended in threats of hits taken out against each other. Some of it was comic: for instance, when Sly blows up his bathroom smoking crack. And there was sadness, as one of the most brilliant musicians of the '60s is becalmed amid drugs and paranoia – a trajectory encoded in the disintegrating tapes of his masterpiece, 1971's *There's A Riot Goin' On*. Ten years in the wrangling, as co-author Ben Greenman – a veteran of books with George Clinton, Gene Simmons, Brian Wilson and Little Steven – gained Stone's trust, Thank You… was the product of hundreds of 15-to-30-minute interview sessions. As Greenman explained on the phone to MOJO, it was likely the last chance – as age and respiratory health issues catch up with the now 80-year-old Stone – to restore one of the most mythologised characters in music to the centre of his own story.

> "WHEN YOU'RE IN THE BUSINESS OF BEING SLY, IT'S UNBELIEVABLY DISORIENTING."
> BEN GREENMAN

Thank You is MOJO's Music Book Of The Year – how about that?

Ben Greenman: It's fantastic. I'm so happy for Sly. I'm gratified because it was such a long time coming and such a difficult, interesting process.

Near the beginning there's a prelude that introduces a somewhat reluctant autobiographer…

BG: It's a big ask, a memoir; you're asking an 80-year-old to inhabit themselves at 60 and 40, and 20, and to go back and try their best to imagine what they felt.

Add to that the fact that his own memories vary, because when you're in the business of being Sly, it's unbelievably disorienting. The crush of fame, the record company pressure, and then you're done by 26, because people look for the new hero. Then there's the drugs. So, he can recall a breakfast from 1968, remember exactly where the eggs were on the plate. But he can't remember Woodstock so precisely. That's odd. But that's how it is. That's how it is, I think, for most of us.

He doesn't come across as overburdened with regrets.

BG: Well, I found the old version of him to be very regretful, and grateful that his children still love him, and people love his music, but he doesn't feel *victimised* by his earlier behaviour. He did the drugs. He did it because he liked it. He did it because it gave him energy. It made him confident and he thought it helped him create.

His manager [and ex-girlfriend] Arlene [Hirschkowitz] says that when he was clean, he was a very shy, almost mild-mannered person, very observant, very brilliant, but not in your face all the time.

You didn't sense the devil in there somewhere?

BG: No. There's a charter with every book, not necessarily a written one, but we talked about what this book should and shouldn't be. For a start, it wasn't a score-settling book. Even stories that I had heard my whole life like the breakup with Larry Graham, his version of that is very gentle.

I asked him about the Bel Air house. It's thought to be the most Mephistophelean site of his career. That's the *Riot* house. The drugs, the guns. His take on it was, "Well, I was just living." And that felt at first like a kind of '60s hippy evasion. But the more I thought about it, the more I kind of got his point. Some people are going to read the book and think, "Shit, this guy doesn't even cop to having hurt people." And other people will say, "This is really sort of refreshing." Because we go through our lives, we do things, and we're not thoughtful about every decision.

He's mentioned that he has a lot of music stockpiled. Do you think we'll ever hear it?

BG: Yes, I know that there is a real attempt to get some of it into this book process, whether it is connected to the audio book, or connected to the promotion. What I've heard of it, I think it's great. It's bedroom recordings for the most part, but lyrically it's very interesting and insightful, in terms of grappling with different levels of his addiction, his removal from the scene, his struggles. I think we will hear some music very soon.

Last question: what's your favourite of the Sly anecdotes?

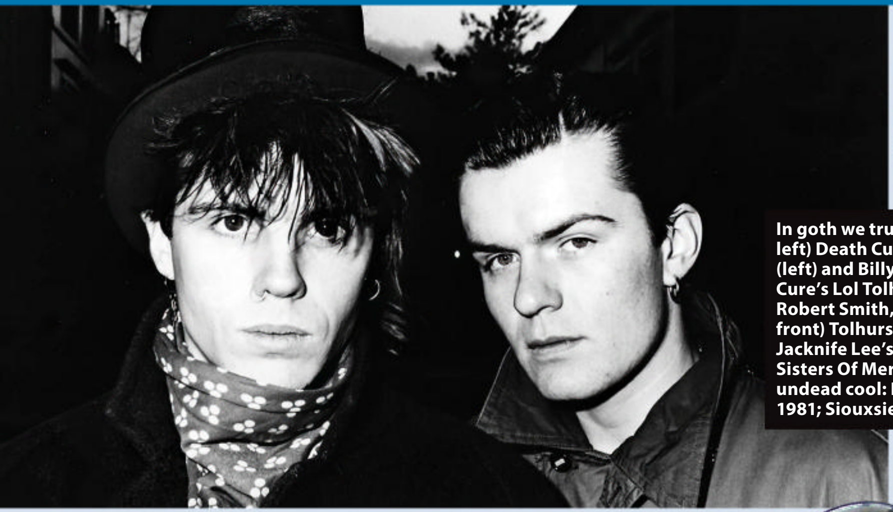
BG: Here's one. They were doing a gig somewhere and they were driving back. They stopped for food – I think it was a Burger King. Then they drove on. And all of a sudden Sly turns to [road manager/archivist] Neal Austinson and says, "We gotta go back to the Burger King," And Neal asks why. And Sly says, "I threw my mouth away." And so they went back and Neal had to go into the dumpster at this fast food place to fish out Sly's false teeth.

It's like, I *knew* Sly was at Woodstock. And while I wanted to hear him reflect on that, I almost loved these stories more – the smaller kind of (*pauses*) grace notes.

THE SHORTLIST

1. **THANK YOU (FALETTINME BE MICE ELF AGIN)** by Sly Stone with Ben Greenman (WHITE RABBIT/AUWA)
2. **BEE GEES: CHILDREN OF THE WORLD** by Bob Stanley (NINE EIGHT)
3. **SEASON OF THE WITCH: THE BOOK OF GOTH** by Cathi Unsworth (NINE EIGHT)
4. **CHUCK BERRY: AN AMERICAN LIFE** by R.J. Smith (OMNIBUS)
5. **REACH FOR THE STARS** by Michael Cragg (NINE EIGHT)
6. **NICK DRAKE: THE LIFE** by Richard Morton Jack (JOHN MURRAY)
7. **BOWIE ODYSSEY 73** by Simon Goddard (OMNIBUS)
8. **BOB DYLAN: MIXING UP THE MEDICINE** by Mark Davidson & Parker Fishel (CALLAWAY)
9. **DANCE YOUR WAY HOME** by Emma Warren (FABER)
10. **SONIC LIFE: A MEMOIR** by Thurston Moore (FABER)

Comeback Of The Year!



JESUS LOVES THE SISTERS
19 85
THE SISTERS OF MERCY

In goth we trust: (clockwise left) Death Cult’s Ian Astbury (left) and Billy Duffy; The Cure’s Lol Tolhurst (left) and Robert Smith, 1984; (from front) Tolhurst, Budgie and Jacknife Lee’s new band; Sisters Of Mercy badges; undead cool: Batcave revellers, 1981; Siouxsie Sioux, 1979.

“There Would Be No Billie Eilish Without Goth”

Back from the grave: goth had a big 2023, with Siouxsie, Lol, Budgie, The Sisters Of Mercy and Death Cult resurgent. Blame the apocalypse, they tell Victoria Segal.

DESPITE APPEARANCES, goth has always been the subculture that refuses to die. Even by its undead standards, however, 2023 has witnessed intense activity. In May, Siouxsie Sioux played her first live shows since 2013. Cure co-founder Lol Tolhurst and former Banshee/Creature Budgie cemented their drummers’ bond by releasing potent, time-slipping collaboration *Los Angeles*. The Sisters Of Mercy played two volatile nights at London’s Roundhouse in September, while The Cult’s Ian Astbury and Billy Duffy announced a tour under their transitional 1983 guise Death Cult. Meanwhile, as if summoned by an unseen bell, there’s also been an outpouring of writing on the subject: John Robb’s The Art Of Darkness; Cathi Unsworth’s Season Of The Witch; Tolhurst’s Goth: A History and Simon Price’s Curepedia.

Why now, though? Why are audiences – “16 to 60,” says Tolhurst – newly drawn to the dark side? Killing Joke frontman Jaz Coleman has a theory. “Young, intelligent people leaving school are basically filled with the same sense of dread that we all felt in the ’70s and ’80s,” he explains cheerfully from his home in Argentina, “that something terrible is going to happen. An external threat that’s going to take out all life.”

Budgie, too, feels the spectre of the past. “There was violence out there, there was an anger out there,” he says. “We felt justified in stepping outside of what was expected.”

Beyond the geopolitical resonances, however, it’s also become clear how broad goth’s church always was. Tolhurst identifies its “pillars” as The Cure, Bauhaus, Joy Division and Siouxsie And The Banshees, while Coleman mentions the importance of DAF and Adam And The Ants’ aesthetic spectacle. Ian Astbury, who performed with Ray Manzarek and Robby Krieger between 2002 and 2007, salutes The Doors’ romantic erudition. The ultimate goth image might be an imperiously back-combed regular at London’s Batcave in 1982, but both he and Tolhurst stress the club’s esoteric diversity.

“There was nobody on the door saying, ‘Oh, you don’t look goth enough, you can’t come in,’” says Tolhurst. And in the digital age, goth – once fiercely tribal – feels supremely adaptive. “There would be no Billie Eilish without goth,” he adds.

IF THE LABEL was once a poisoned chalice, there’s a sense of détente among its pioneers. “It’s a bit disingenuous to look back 40 years and say, ‘We were never goth,’ because it’s like Schrödinger’s Cat,” says Tolhurst. “Yes, we were. And no, we weren’t.”

> **“AT THE TIME, IT WAS A PUT-DOWN – ‘OH, GOTH KIDS, THEY’RE JUST SPIKY HAIR, BAT EARRINGS…’”**
>
> **IAN ASTBURY**

“It’s been recontextualised,” says Astbury, who prefers the term “gothic futurist”. “At the time, it was a put-down – ‘Oh, goth kids, they’re just spiky hair, bat earrings, they go out drinking Pernod.’”

“Goth to me is a more realistic version of the hippies in lots of ways,” says Tolhurst. “Different clothes and different music – but it’s very much a utopian feeling. Human beings in general need that.”

Yet other more personal stories have guided Goth 2023. For Budgie, it was a matter of recalibrating his life after his marriage to Siouxsie Sioux ended in 2007. He remembers Sioux and Steve Severin remastering the Banshees’ back catalogue shortly after. “I couldn’t even listen to it,” he says. “I couldn’t hear Siouxsie’s voice. It was just all too raw.”

He talks movingly about rediscovering his place – not just Berlin, where he lives with his young family, but through low-key stints with admirers Efterklang and John Grant. His friendship with Tolhurst – they first met in 1979 – slowly bloomed into an album. “We were far enough from what had happened to be able to skip on,” he says, smiling. He too is writing a memoir.

Timing is all, and the clock keeps chiming. It’s 40 years since Death Cult formed: Astbury explains they wanted to honour that brief moment’s wild adrenaline. Tolhurst, meanwhile, was struck by meeting palliative care doctor Kathryn Mannix who “writes books about the most difficult conversation you have – what are you going to do at the end? And the strength of goth is it acknowledges that. It doesn’t go, ‘Let’s just dance and put it away until we have to think about it’ – because it comes to all of us.”

“It’s for anybody who feels outside,” says Astbury. “But probably most folks feel like outsiders now.”

Mick Mercer, Tom Sheehan, Getty

30

SPARKS

The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte

(ISLAND)

Among the highlights of Glastonbury 2023, few will forget Friday's Sparks set on the Park Stage, enhanced by guest dancer Cate Blanchett for the title track of this 25th studio LP. Well over 50 years into a spectacularly odd career, the Mael Brothers' vision and cult charm only seemed to intensify, their gilded art-synth-pop and peculiar worldview – Skrillex and Kim Jong Un in the same song – prompting the accurate deployment of an overused term: unique! **Standout track:** The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte

29

CACTI
BILLY NOMATES

BILLY NOMATES

Cacti

(INVADA)

"I didn't come here to try to put things right," announced Tor Maries, AKA Billy Nomates, on Spite, one of many uncompromising highlights of her second album. *Cacti* was a raging, dynamic upgrade of her DIY synth-pop-gone-punk MO, accommodating diverse sounds – a little LCD Soundsystem here, a heap of lonesome country there – even as her own character shone brighter. Billy Nomates' future is currently unclear, with Maries quietly releasing new music on Bandcamp as Tor. **Standout track:** Vertigo

28

FATOUMATA DIAWARA
LONDON KO

FATOUMATA DIAWARA

London Ko

(WAGRAM)

Born in Mali, resident in Italy, recording in Paris and London, hungry for Cuban and US soul influences, Diawara remained the definition of a truly global artist. Her third solo LP's title reflected the presence of one key collaborator – old Gorillaz compadre Damon Albarn, who co-composed and produced six out of 14 tracks – but *London Ko*'s energy united multiple disparate strands (including a brilliant Angie Stone cameo) into one cohesive, boundary-smashing musical celebration. **Standout track:** Somaw

27

MOZART ESTATE
POP-UP!
KER-CHING!
AND THE
POSSIBILITIES
OF MODERN
SHOPPING

MOZART ESTATE

Pop-Up! Ker-Ching! And The Possibilities Of Modern Shopping

(WEST MIDLANDS)

An LP first announced five years ago, when Lawrence (ex-Felt, ex-Denim) changed the name of his latterday vehicle from Go-Kart Mozart to Mozart Estate, *Pop Up! Ker-Ching!* suggested the great British eccentric's pop ambitions remained rooted in a '70s youth club disco. His devotion to creating novelty hits out of time remained unerring, peaking with fuzzy belt-buckle boogie Record Store Day, and its chorus: "John Peel! Mark E Smith! Rough Trade!" **Standout track:** Record Store Day

26

ANOHNI AND THE JOHNSONS

My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross

(ROUGH TRADE)

While 2016's *Hopelessness* soundtracked politically intense songs with dystopian electronica, the settings on Anohni's fifth LP were softer, more organic, soulful and constructed with the aid of pop producer Jimmy Hogarth (James Blunt). Her subject matter, however, remained unflinching: torch songs of protest, guilt and mourning for both the planet and for individuals, so that Sliver Of Ice was inspired by Lou Reed's final words to her. **Standout track:** Scapegoat

25

YO LA TENGO

This Stupid World

(MATADOR)

2018's *There's A Riot Going On* responded to global conflagrations with introversion and quietude. Its follow-up proper, however – Yo La Tengo album number 17, roughly – was a more varied, often noisier proposition: one of those cherishable Yo La Tengo albums (like 1997's *I Can Hear The Heart Beating As One*) that covered all their bases: epic feedback vistas, punchy buzzpop, hushed lullabies, strafed motorik hums for the New Jersey Turnpike, and much more. **Standout track:** Fallout

24

LISA O'NEILL

All Of This Is Chance

(ROUGH TRADE)

The adventurous avant-garde of Irish folk finally broke cover in 2023 (see our feature on page 46). At the forefront, alongside Lankum and John Francis Flynn, was County Cavan's Lisa O'Neill, whose wise, bewitching fifth album focused on humanity's flawed relationship with the environment. O'Neill made traditional music that understood and honoured its roots but was at times shocking in its contemporary resonance. A fearless moderniser, who could sound as ancient as the days. **Standout track:** If I Was A Painter

23

NOTHING LASTS FOREVER

TEENAGE FANCLUB

Nothing Lasts Forever

(PEMA)

If 2021's *Endless Arcade* was permeated by melancholy – Norman Blake's divorce, Gerard Love's departure – the 12th Fannies album presented something of a mature fresh start: "It's time to move along/And leave the past behind me," began Blake on Foreign Land. Much, though, remained reassuringly constant, the quintet continuing to finesse the warm, harmonious jangle-rock that had served them so well for so long. An object lesson in growing older gracefully. **Standout track:** Tired Of Being Alone

22

JOHN CALE

Mercy

(DOMINO)

Alongside Ian Hunter, Shirley Collins, Paul Simon and Mick Jagger, Cale was another octogenarian making vital music in 2023. His 17th solo album was often saturated by memories – of NYC nights with Bowie; of "moonstruck junkie lady" Nico – even as they were soundtracked by modernist, crepuscular electronica. Weyes Blood, Animal Collective and Fat White Family provided unostentatious support; wholly integrated collaborators rather than hip accoutrements. **Standout track:** Night Crawling

21

BILLY WOODS AND KENNY SEGAL

BILLY WOODS & KENNY SEGAL

Maps

(BACKWOODZ)

An under-the-radar New York rapper for the past two decades, the secretive and independently-minded Woods edged a little closer to the spotlight in 2023 with two exceptional albums. This collaboration with producer Segal was the pick – a torrential, erudite treatise on travel and dislocation with support from Danny Brown and Future Islands frontman Sam Herring – but don't sleep on album two, *We Buy Diabetic Test Strips*, a similarly gripping testament from his duo, Armand Hammer. **Standout track:** FaceTime

Laura Lewis

ELECTRONICA

Compiled by STEPHEN WORTHY

1. **JAMES HOLDEN (ABOVE)** Imagine This Is A High Dimensional Space Of All Possibilities (BORDER COMMUNITY)
2. **FOREST SWORDS** Bolted (NINJA TUNE)
3. **LORAINE JAMES** Gentle Confrontation (HYPERDUB)
4. **JAMES BLAKE** Playing Robots Into Heaven (POLYDOR)
5. **µ-ZIQ** 1977 (BALMAT)
6. **ANTHONY NAPLES** Orbs (ANS)
7. **CLARK** Sus Dog (THROTTLE)
8. **CREEP SHOW** Yawning Abyss (BELLA UNION)
9. **LAUREL HALO** Atlas (AWE)
10. **LORD OF THE ISLES** Subtle Thoughts (LAPSUS)

WORLD

Compiled by DAVID HUTCHEON

1. **TINARIWEN (ABOVE)** Amatssou (WEDGE)
2. **FATOUMATA DIAWARA** London Ko (WAGRAM)
3. **ROGÊ** Curyman (DIAMOND WEST)
4. **BAABA MAAL** Being (ATELIER LIVE)
5. **GAYE SU AKYOL** Anadolu Ejderi (GLITTERBEAT)
6. **WITCH** Zango (DESERT DAZE SOUND)
7. **ANOUSHKA SHANKAR** Chapter I: Forever, For Now (LEITER)
8. **ALOGTE OHO AND HIS SOUNDS OF JOY** O Yinne! (PHILOPHON)
9. **MOONLIGHT BENJAMIN** Wayo (MA CASE)
10. **VINICIO CAPOSSELA** Tredici Canzoni Urgenti (LA CÙPA)

The 75 Best Albums Of 2023

20

PRETENDERS
RELENTLESS

PRETENDERS

Relentless

(PARLOPHONE)

Like Sparks, TV coverage of Glastonbury reminded the general public of the Pretenders' enduring brilliance – and like Sparks, Chrissie Hynde's band also had a fine record (their 12th) to back it up. Aided by guitarist/co-songwriter James Walbourne, *Relentless* was a classic Pretenders album: punchy, swaggering, rueful, imbued with rock'n'roll romance, great ballads, unfussy virtuosity and, at its heart, the magnetic presence of Hynde, in spectacularly good voice. Their best in years.

Standout track: A Love

19

NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS

Council Skies

(SOUR MASH)

The cover of Gallagher's fourth post-Oasis LP told its own story: the roundabout in Manchester where the Maine Road football ground once stood. Musically, *Council Skies* was a similarly mature, often emotional, trip back to old territory, with recent disco forays mostly sidelined in favour of heartland anthemics. Still room for new directions, mind, in the shape of the Cure-like Pretty Boy and Dead To The World's John Barry-ish cinematics.

Standout track: Easy Now

18

JAMES HOLDEN

Imagine This Is A High Dimensional Space Of All Possibilities

(BORDER COMMUNITY)

Holden has been exploring various psychedelic states for over 20 years, his electronic productions tipping into spiritual jazz, Moroccan gnawa and more. His fourth solo album, however, zeroed in on the ecstatic possibilities of techno, packed with the endless arpeggios and utopian hippy vibes that had powered the UK's outdoor rave scene in the early '90s. At once nostalgic and progressive, in 2023 Holden sounded like he was in a field of his own.

Standout track: Contains Multitudes

17

BOYGENIUS

The Record

(INTERSCOPE)

A celebration of friendship and communal creativity, the first Boygenius album also allowed Phoebe Bridgers to give mates Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker a lift on her rapidly ascending trajectory. The resulting record was an object lesson in how to retool vintage college rock for the 2020s, the attendant self-analysis and wisecracks judiciously updated, too. Best quote: Dacus's "An old man having an existential crisis at a Buddhist monastery/Writing horny poetry", from Leonard Cohen.

Standout track: Emily I'm Sorry

16

Love in Exile

AROOJ AFTAB, VIJAY IYER, SHAHZAD ISMAILY

Love In Exile

(VERVE)

Another triple threat, as the exceptional singer and composer Aftab developed her silvery hybrid of Pakistani Ghazal, ambient music and jazz in the company of garlanded pianist Iyer and multi-tasking bassist Ismaily (last spotted backing Dylan on *Shadow Kingdom*). A single day in a New York studio birthed this 75-minute marvel, where the improvisations were so subtle, so organic, the resulting songs felt like they'd been crafted over years rather than hours.

Standout track: Haseen Thi

15

THE LAST ROTATION OF EARTH

BC CAMPLIGHT

The Last Rotation Of Earth

(BELLA UNION)

While John Grant busied himself with his Creep Show side-project, Bella Union's supersub Brian Christinzio brilliantly seized his chance. New Jersey-born, Manchester-resident, Christinzio's sixth BC Camplight LP presented a litany of trauma – most recently, the end of a long-term relationship – as a kind of tragicomic, self-deprecating musical, its memorable showstoppers delivered by an unreliable narrator in a Kermit onesie who could claim, audaciously, that It Never Rains In Manchester.

Standout track: The Last Rotation Of Earth

14

CHAOS FOR THE FLY

GRIAN CHATTEN

Chaos For The Fly

(PARTISAN)

A title borrowed from Morticia Addams suggested the Fontaines D.C. frontman was skewing closer to 2023's pervading goth currents. Chatten's solo debut, however, was more faded glamour than graveyard chic, an evolving singer-songwriter trying on baroque new styles – a frisson of Bacharach? – in a declining seaside town. Like Alex Turner before him, Chatten seemed to be searching for a life beyond the indie crowdpleasers – though, happily, Fontaines D.C. are scheduled to return in 2024.

Standout track: All Of The People

13

The Necks
Travel

THE NECKS

Travel

(NORTHERN SPY)

Connoisseurs of jazz, post-rock, ambient and various other manifestations of avant music have long raved about The Necks. Thirty-six years into their career, their cult is still growing (predecessor *Three* ranked Number 33 in our 2020 chart) with LP number 22 another keeper. *Travel* consisted of four intuitively switched-on improv sessions, around 20 minutes each, demonstrating how the Australian trio could locate infinite musical variety in apparently simple keyboard/bass/drums intersections.

Standout track: Signal

12

The Coral
Sea of Mirrors

THE CORAL

Sea Of Mirrors

(RUN ON)

No strangers, like Grian Chatten, to the allure of seaside resorts (see 2021's *Coral Island*), Wirral visionaries The Coral ventured further afield on their latest meticulously conceptualised LP. *Sea Of Mirrors* was cinematic in scope, with particular focus on spaghetti westerns, and starrily cast; Cillian Murphy cameo'd. Beneath the set dressing, however, James Skelly and co's psychedelically-tinted songwriting brilliance was a powerful constant – as it was on a second, companion album, *Holy Joe's Coral Island Medicine Show*.

Standout track: Oceans Apart

11

WILCO COUSIN

WILCO

Cousin

(DBPM)

For Wilco album number 13, Cate Le Bon stepped in as the Chicago institution's first external producer in 16 years – "To have someone else keeping an eye out for my maudlin tendency," Jeff Tweedy told us. If 2022's *Cruel Country* privileged a singular take on roots tradition, *Cousin* was informed by chillier art-pop, by new textures, as Wilco gradually melded them with their own experimental instincts and their finely-honed songcraft – and with Tweedy's imperishable humanity.

Standout track: Meant To Be

SOUL

Compiled by **LOIS WILSON**

1 **JALEN NGONDA (ABOVE)**
Come Around And Love Me (DAPTONE)

2 **SAY SHE SHE**
Silver (KARMA CHIEF)

3 **ROBERT FINLEY**
Black Bayou (EASY EYE SOUND)

4 **BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA**
Echoes Of The South (SINGLE LOCK)

5 **GABRIELS**
Angels & Queens (PARLOPHONE/ATLAS ARTISTS)

6 **BILLY VALENTINE**
Billy Valentine & The Universal Truth (ACID JAZZ)

7 **BETTYE LAVETTE**
LaVette! (JAY VEE RECORDS)

8 **DURAND JONES**
Wait Til I Get Over (DEAD OCEANS)

9 **BLACK PUMAS**
Chronicles Of A Diamond (ATO)

10 **TAJ MAHAL**
Savoy (STONY PLAIN)

FOLK

Compiled by **JIM WIRTH**

1 **LANKUM (ABOVE)**
False Lankum (ROUGH TRADE)

2 **SHIRLEY COLLINS**
Archangel Hill (DOMINO)

3 **LISA O'NEILL**
All Of This Is Chance (ROUGH TRADE)

4 **ME LOST ME**
RPG (UPSET THE RHYTHM)

5 **MARTIN SIMPSON & THOMM JUTZ**
Nothing But Green Willow (TOPIC)

6 **JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN**
Look Over The Wall, See The Sky (RIVER LEA)

7 **HACK-POET'S GUILD**
Blackletter Garland (ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT)

8 **THE MARY WALLOPERS**
Irish Rock N Roll (BC)

9 **JIM GHEDI & TOBY HAY**
Jim Ghedi & Toby Hay (TOPIC)

10 **ØXN**
Cyrm (CLADDAGH)

MOJO / The Best Of 2023

ON YOUR MOJO CD THIS MONTH...

1 YOUNG FATHERS

Drum

A highlight of the Edinburgh band's fourth LP. "They sound like they're having a ball," wrote MOJO's Tom Doyle, "whether expressing the sheer delight to be found in rhythm or indulging in daft punning."

Written by Bankole, Hastings, Massaquoi. Published by Just Isn't Music. ℗&©2023 Ninja Tune. From *Heavy Heavy* (Ninja Tune). www.ninjatune.net / www.young-fathers.com

2 THE TUBS

Round The Bend

"I want to write about how bad mental health can make you a prick. There's nothing virtuous about it," Tubs frontman Owen Williams told us, explaining frenetic janglers like Round The Bend. For fans of Sugar's If I Can't Change Your Mind.

Written by Williams, Nicholls, Warren, Stonholdt. ℗&©2023 The Tubs/Trouble In Mind Records. From *Dead Meat* (Trouble In Mind Records); www.troubleinmindrecords.com

3 THE CORAL

Oceans Apart

A highlight of The Coral's 11th album, the band's ever-maturing songcraft augmented by string arrangements from High Llama Sean O'Hagan. Note, too, the closing soliloquy from Cillian Murphy: blurring the edges between ocean and desert, fact and fiction.

Written by J. Skelly, I. Skelly, N. Power, S. O'Hagan. Published by Domino. ℗&©Run On Records in association with Modern Sky UK. From *Sea Of Mirrors*. ISRC UKWX82100752

4 ANOHNI AND THE JOHNSONS

Scapegoat

Curtis Mayfield guitar flecks elide into one climax after another, as Anohni gracefully, but unstintingly, skewers misogyny. Has she ever sounded so soulful?

Written by Anohni Hegarty, Jimmy Hogarth. ℗2023 Rebis Music under exclusive licence to Rough Trade Records Limited. Published by Downtown Music Publishing. ISRC no. GB-CVZ-22-00470. Licensed courtesy of Rough Trade Records Limited by arrangement with Beggars Group Media Limited. www.roughtraderecords.com

5 LANKUM

Clear Away In The Morning

A 1971 sea shanty by New England folkie Gordon Bok, radically reinvented by the Irish radicals at their most cosmic and expansive.

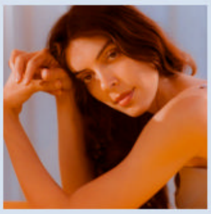
Written by Cormac Dermody, Daragh Lynch, Gordon Bok, Ian Lynch, John Murphy, Radie Peat. ℗2023 Lankum under exclusive licence to Rough Trade Records Limited. Published by Beggars Music ISRC no. GB-CVZ-22-00427 Licensed courtesy of Rough Trade Records Limited by arrangement with Beggars Group Media Limited www.roughtraderecords.com

6 GRIAN CHATTEN

All Of The People

The Fontaines D.C. frontman's original plan for his solo debut was "wildly experimental. Like, Let's do a techno tune, let's do a hip-hop tune, a Cohen-esque tune…" Here, perhaps, is the Cohen-esque tune, a piano ballad flowering into rueful chamber pop.

Written by Chatten, Vicci. Published by Domino and Bucks Music Group. From *Chaos For The Fly* (Partisan Records); https://partisanrecords.com/



7 JULIE BYRNE

Portrait Of A Clear Day

The nature of Byrne's *The Greater Wings* focused as much on the consolations of memory as on the pain of grief, exemplified here on this spectrally gorgeous cut. Amidst heartbreaking thoughts of her late partner, Eric Littmann, Byrne asserts, "What we've known/I'll carry that through time."

Written by J. Byrne. Published by Mute Song Limited (PRS); ℗&©2023 Ghostly International. From *The Greater Wings*

8 WILCO

Meant To Be

If Wilco's 13th pondered how to reconcile art-pop with Jeff Tweedy's "big softie" tendency, Meant To Be provided resolution: "If my words say what you meant to say/Doesn't that say we were meant to feel this way?"

Written by Jeff Tweedy. Performed by Wilco. Produced by Cate Le Bon. Publisher: Words Ampersand Music (BMI) - Administered by BMG. Label: dBpm Records. Licensed dBpm Records Inc. c/o Provident Financial Management. www.wilcoworld.net

9 BILLY WOODS & KENNY SEGAL

FaceTime (Feat. Sam Herring)

New York rapper Billy Woods meditates on the disorientations of life on the road – "flying EasyJet/Bratislava to Utrecht" – and finds a kindred spirit in Future Islands frontman Sam Herring, looking for epiphanies at the hotel breakfast buffet.

Written by Billy Woods & Samuel T Herring. Produced by Kenny Segal. ℗&©2023 Backwoodz Studioz. From *Maps* (Backwoodz Studioz/Fat Possum Records)

10 RICKIE LEE JONES

Just In Time

RLJ purrs through the 1956 chestnut, once crooned by Frank, Dean, et al. Dire Straits sideman Mike Mainieri provides equally nimble support on vibes.

Written by Jule Styne, Betty Comden, Adolph Green. Stratford Music Corporation (ASCAP) Produced by Russ Titelman ℗2023 Rickie Lee Jones under exclusive licence to BMG Rights Management (US) LLC. Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd. From *Pieces Of Treasure*. ISRC: QMRSZ2203398

11 JAIMIE BRANCH

Baba Louie

The story of the great, tragically fallen trumpeter is told on page 56. Here she's at her most joyous, propelling her band – via horn and vocal exhortations – through carnival jazz-calypso and into deeper, dubbed-out, skanking zones.

Written by Jaimie Branch. Published by Pionic Worldwide Publishing BMI. From *Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War))*. ℗&©2023 International Anthem www.intlanthem.com

12 EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL

Run A Red Light

Tracey Thorn sings intimately of a DJ yearning for a bigger stage is cushioned by iPhone piano loops that build into a "dreamlike ether" akin to I'm Not In Love. "We did think, That sounds quite like 10cc," Ben Watt admitted to MOJO. "But it wasn't intentional."

Written by Watt. Published by Sony/ATV Music Publishing. From *Fuse*. ℗&©2023 Buzzin' Fly. www.ebtg.com

13 BC CAMPLIGHT

The Last Rotation Of Earth

R. Stevie Moore, a Tesco delivery man and a talking bird team up to help Brian Christinzio come out the other side of heartbreak on this piano-stepping showstopper. Ends, fittingly, with a big bang.

Written by Brian Christinzio. Published by Faber ℗&©2023 Bella Union under exclusive licence to [PIAS]. From *The Last Rotation Of Earth* (Bella Union Records)

14 SLOWDIVE

Shanty

Strong *Dark Side Of The Moon* vibes at the start of this choice selection from Slowdive's latest comeback, before the trademark wall of FX phase in. Meaning, traditionally, remains elusive: "Being vague isn't unusual for us," Neil Halstead told us. "I don't really know what the record is about, or most of the songs."

Written by N. Halstead. Published by Warp Publishing (PRS); ℗&©2023 Dead Oceans. From *Everything Is Alive*

15 ROBERT FORSTER

Tender Years

"There is a story to tell," sings Forster, and the one that unravels in Tender Years – and underpins all of his eighth solo album – is a 33-year epic charting his relationship with wife Karin Bäumler. One of his finest, and most moving, songs.

Written by Forster. Published by Tapete Songs, ℗&©2023 Tapete Records. From *The Candle And The Flame*. (Tapete Records TR525), ISRC DEU162306001, www.tapeterecords.com

Rob Walbers, Maria Cecilia Tedemalm, Jack Finnigan Image by Anohni with Nomi Ruiz © Rebis Music 2023, Ellius Grace, Eimear Lynch, Tonje Thilesen, Peter Crosby, Alexander Richter, Astor Morgan, Ben Semisch, Edward Bishop, Francesca Pidgeon, Ingrid Pop, Stephen Booth

Tragic Triumph Of The Year

Fly or Die II

Breezy does it: Jaimie Branch had a unique talent for making her eclecticism sound accessible; (right) bassist Jason Ajemian; (inset) 2019's *Fly Or Die II: Bird Dogs Of Paradise*.

New York Times/Redux/Eyevine

"She Could Say *Anything* With Her Horn"

Jaimie Branch grabbed ears and stole hearts in 2023. So sad she didn't live to see it. "She was bubbling with energy," learns Andy Cowan.

JAIMIE BRANCH didn't stand on ceremony. That's clear from just a cursory listen to the late trumpeter, singer and composer's final recording, voted a Top 10 album of 2023 by the writers of MOJO.

Finished months before the 39-year-old died from an accidental overdose at home in Red Hook, Brooklyn in August last year, *Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War))* was a joyous denouement to a riotous jazz trajectory. Although it closes with a funereal dirge, the album's celebratory tone belied Branch's struggles with addiction – she had been an on/off heroin user since 2008 – and caught her at a levitating artistic peak. Branch was a rare talent who put her distinctive stamp on recordings by TV On The Radio, Yo La Tengo, Elza Soares and Jeff Parker, not to mention those by established jazz artists including James Brandon Lewis and William Parker.

Ever since 2017's first bandleader outing *Fly Or Die* and 2019's sequel *II: Bird Dogs Of Paradise*, Branch had specialised in outside-the-box thinking. While that could embrace the avant-garde (see *Kudu* and *Pink Dolphins*, the two synth symphonies she recorded with drummer Jason Nazary as Anteloper), she had a unique talent for making her eclecticism sound accessible. Branch's breezy disregard for genre distinctions (she was known to friends as 'Breezy'), allowed her music to draw on hot Latin dance, careening calypso, bolshy punk, psych and dub. While that would sound a hot mess in most hands, it was anything but in hers.

Born on Long Island, New York, in 1983, Branch moved to the Chicago suburbs aged nine and started playing trumpet in the school band. "She was bubbling with energy," says bassist Jason Ajemian, who met Branch just after she left high school. "I definitely sensed a fire burning inside her."

After sharing an artists' residency in Ohio, the pair's paths would cross frequently on the local circuit, between further music school studies in Boston, Baltimore and New York. Branch and her dog Kuma would settle in the latter in 2015, minutes away from Ajemian and her other *Fly Or Die* bandmates, fellow Chicago transplants Chad Taylor and Lester St Louis. "When we got together and made music," says Ajemian, "it was joyous and infinite."

> **"I DEFINITELY SENSED A FIRE BURNING INSIDE HER."**
> **JASON AJEMIAN**

BRANCH'S PERSONALITY crackled through the untutored whooping power of her raspy, soulful voice – perfect for delivering the political sentiment of the *Fly Or Die Fly*… album's Take Over The World. But it came through clearest in her passionate trumpet artistry, with its barely-there echoes of Don Cherry, Eddie Henderson and Miles Davis. "She would express the fullest range of emotions," says Ajemian, "she could say *anything* with her horn."

Branch's direct approach initially dumbfounded UK poet/saxophonist Alabaster DePlume, when their paths crossed at Hackney creative hub the Total Refreshment Centre. "At first I thought it was very brutal, loud and brash," he admits. "It was disarming and challenging. But the truth was it was just full of life, full of furious joy."

The pair would become strong friends and allies ("We were quite different in our ways, but we rhymed"), with Branch playing stage-right in the horseshoe-shaped formation favoured by DePlume. "We would lock eyes and it would be like this intense discussion. She's got a boldness – more instigating, more forward – while I like to go under as I play. We complemented each other."

Branch may be gone but she's an unfadeable presence in those she touched. "The week before she passed, she came to Alaska to celebrate my birthday," says Ajemian. "On the way back I demonstrated the flight characteristic of weightlessness. She loved it, was crying laughing, her face was fireball red, exploding with joy. I think of that marvellous face often. I *love* that woman!"

DePlume, meanwhile, calls her "an unfathomable wonder who will set people's hearts free with her compositions for centuries." He recently revisited her old haunts in Red Hook. "It was wonderful," he says, before addressing his departed friend: "I can't walk beside you any more, but I can walk beside you *all* the time."

The 75 Best Albums Of 2023

10

The Greater Wings

JULIE BYRNE

The Greater Wings
(GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL)

As with this year's LPs by Sufjan Stevens and Depeche Mode, the third by Buffalo singer-songwriter Byrne was underscored by grief, following the death of her longtime collaborator Eric Littman. But while *The Greater Wings* was an undeniably sad record – its fragile folk constructs given ethereal heft by co-producer Alex Somers – it was also one that worked movingly through valediction towards transcendence. "Just doing it shows [it's] about resilience and living," Somers told us.

Standout track: The Greater Wings

9

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL

Fuse
(BUZZIN' FLY)

Musical hiatuses can rarely have been as amicable as the 24-year gap between the 10th and 11th EBTG albums. Tracey Thorn and Ben Watt's return to making records together began as a tentative private endeavour and flourished in this artful maturing of the EBTG sound; grown-up, suitably reflective songs with cutting-edge beats and nightlife settings. "There's definitely a vibe of that celebratory club experience," Thorn told MOJO, "but the lyrics also go very deep internally."

Standout track: Run A Red Light

8

PAUL SIMON
SEVEN PSALMS

PAUL SIMON

Seven Psalms
(OWL/SONY)

A 33-minute continuous piece of music, with a title that came to him in a dream and a prevailing spirituality that remained questing rather than resolved, Simon's 15th solo album also looped back to his first, 1965's London-set *The Paul Simon Songbook*. The resonances ran through *Seven Psalms'* dominant sound – Simon's solitary, adroit fingerpicking, the influence of Davey Graham still reverberating. "This is me 58 years older," Simon told MOJO. "I'm still that person."

Standout track: The Lord

7

JAIMIE BRANCH

Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War))
(INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM)

Calling the late trumpeter Jaimie Branch a jazz musician was an unfortunately reductive way of describing a colossal talent – one showcased in all its exuberant complexity on this final LP, recorded four months before her death in 2022. Branch's third *Fly Or Die* LP straddled carnival hardcore, a Meat Puppets cover, protest ballads and her free and joyous rethink of jazz orthodoxy. A landmark album, tragically pulsating with life.

Standout track: Baba Louie

6

Did you know that there's a tunnel under Ocean Blvd
Lana Del Rey

LANA DEL REY

Did You Know That There's A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd
(INTERSCOPE)

A plea for brother Charlie to quit smoking. A song titled Grandfather Please Stand On The Shoulders Of My Father While He's Deep-Sea Fishing. Another called The Grants. The artist born Lizzy Grant's volatile mix of mythography and confession got tricksier on her ninth, the blasted Hollywood ballads self-referentially turning in on themselves as Taco Truck sampled 2019's Venice Bitch. Release by release, the discography only gets more rewarding, the story more complex.

Standout track: A&W

5

YOUNG FATHERS

Heavy Heavy
(NINJA TUNE)

The fourth Young Fathers album hardly made the job of categorising them any easier, but it did emphasise how the Edinburgh trio had stealthily become one of the most important bands in the UK. *Heavy Heavy* was a densely-layered grid of influence, as soul, rock, chants, handclaps, frictional electronic soundscapes and even a touch of glam (I Saw) fed into something constantly shifting, constantly dynamic. A career high, that promised much more to come.

Standout track: Drum

4

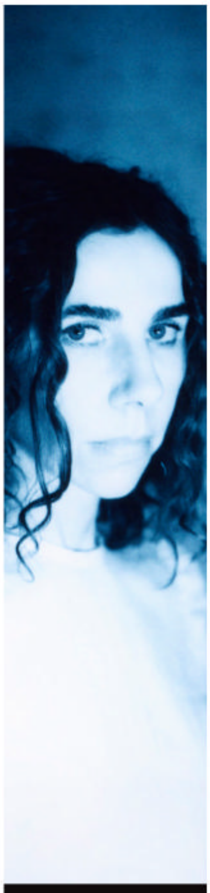
The Candle And The Flame
Robert Forster

ROBERT FORSTER

The Candle And The Flame
(TAPETE)

Forster's most famous partnership was with Grant McLennan in The Go-Betweens, but it would be another long-term relationship that informed his eighth solo LP – his marriage to Karin Bäumler, who was fighting cancer as she played on the album alongside Forster and their two children. *TCATF*, then, was family bonding ritual as universal solace: songs of love, memory and resilience that were just as moving even without knowing the backstory.

Standout track: Tender Years



P.J. Harvey: at her earthiest and most spiritual.

3

LANKUM

False Lankum
(ROUGH TRADE)

From squat punk outliers to the most acclaimed folk band in years, the journey of this Dublin collective was miraculously navigated without compromise – hence the imposing landmark of their fourth LP. *False Lankum*, with its gothic shanties and glowering noise, located a space where avant-doom met traditional song and somehow made both more accessible. Modern folk's *OK Computer* or *The Dark Side Of The Moon*, pronounced MOJO's reviewer.

Standout track: Clear Away In The Morning

2

P.J. HARVEY

I Inside The Old Year Dying
(PARTISAN)

P.J. Harvey's recent activity seemed to be moving away from music, with 2022's epic poem Orlam in arcane Dorset dialect. In fact, it was all part of a bigger project manifested in this tenth LP, that redeployed sections of Orlam for skeletal, seasonal, magically-inclined songs of her home county's countryside. *I Inside The Old Year Dying* was Harvey at her earthiest and most spiritual, creating a powerful new mythology out of simple elements.

Standout track: A Child's Question, August

Steve Gullick, Ben Semisch/Courtesy of Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

JAZZ

Compiled by ANDY COWAN

1 **JAIMIE BRANCH (ABOVE)**
Fly Or Die Fly Or Die Fly Or Die ((World War)) (INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM)

2 **KASSA OVERALL**
Animals (WARP)

3 **LONDON BREW**
London Brew (CONCORD JAZZ)

4 **JAMES BRANDON LEWIS/RED LILY QUINTET**
For Mahalia, With Love (TAO FORMS)

5 **DEVON RUSSELL GRAY, NATHAN HANSON, DAVU SERU**
We Sick (INNOVA)

6 **THANDI NTULI WITH CARLOS NIÑO**
Rainbow Revisited (INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM)

7 **DWIGHT TRIBLE**
Ancient Future (GEARBOX)

8 **KENDRICK SCOTT**
Corridors (BLUE NOTE)

9 **KOFI FLEXXX**
Flowers In The Dark (NATIVE REBEL)

10 **MULTITRACTION ORCHESTRA**
Reactor One (SUPERPANG)

AMERICANA

Compiled by SYLVIE SIMMONS

1 **JASON ISBELL & THE 400 UNIT (ABOVE)**
Weathervanes (SOUTHEASTERN)

2 **JOE HENRY**
All The Eye Can See (EARMUSIC)

3 **TANYA TUCKER**
Sweet Western Sound (FANTASY)

4 **MALCOLM HOLCOMBE**
Bits & Pieces (PROPER/NEED TO KNOW)

5 **JOBI RICCIO**
Whiplash (YEP ROC)

6 **HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER**
Jump For Joy (MERGE)

7 **BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY**
Keeping Secrets Will Destroy You (DRAG CITY)

8 **JANA HORN**
The Window Is The Dream (NO QUARTER)

9 **THE WOOD BROTHERS**
Heart Is The Hero (HONEY JAR)

10 **THE HANDSOME FAMILY**
Hollow (LOOSE)

blur
THE BALLAD OF DARREN

“These Songs Clearly Were Highly Personal”

1

BLUR

The Ballad Of Darren
(PARLOPHONE)

An album to genuinely rank with their best was not the only surprise sprung by Blur, and their emotional frontman, in 2023. By Danny Eccleston.

JULY 9, 2023. WEMBLEY STADIUM. Sunday Sunday. Here again in tidy attire, Blur's Damon Albarn is perched on the very front of the vast stage having a very public, private chat with a man from South America who's clearly in bits. Albarn is warm, appreciative, calming, but not unaffected. He will choke up at least twice during this intense greatest hits show, the second of two consecutive nights that seem to embrace all that Blur and their fiftysomething core fans have been through since the band's debut single, She's So High, cracked the UK Top 50 in October 1990.

Not least, recent developments have included ructions in Albarn's private life widely reported across Britain's tabloid press and the recording of a new Blur album, whose July 21 release will be trailed with two songs, The Narcissist and St Charles Square, full of the peculiar English melancholy that identifies Blur, and Albarn, at their best.

While an album, despite emerging from under a well-maintained blanket of hush-hush, was not a surprise in itself – Blur's last major reactivation for shows in 2015 was accompanied by *The Magic Whip* – one this good took many aback. *The Magic Whip*'s reflections on modern Hong Kong, where recording had begun in 2013, were thoughtful but tangential, and the music hardly bulged with the viscera of the band. By contrast, *The Ballad Of Darren* had classic-Blur heft, tunes that demanded airspace in their own right and lyrics that hit directly home. The first words Albarn sang, on beautiful opener The Ballad, were, “I just looked into my life/And all I saw is you're not coming back,” and a sadly rueful mood sustained. As bassist Alex James once noted of Blur's *13*, the album that reckoned with the fall-out of the '90s, and Albarn's relationship with Elastica's Justine Frischmann, there was blood on these tracks.

Some songs – notably The Narcissist with its reference to “the service station on the road” to Glastonbury – seemed consciously to take stock of Blur's journey, just as the reunited band's tour itinerary visited key locations in their history: the Arts Centre in Colchester – the town that raised Albarn, his guitarist schoolmate Graham Coxon and drummer Dave Rowntree; the Civic Hall, Wolverhampton – home of the early Blur's most fervent fans. Everywhere there were musical coups big and small: the organ-laced jangle-pop of Barbaric; the cinematic balladry of Russian Strings; the Bacharachy chords of Avalon.

Albarn did not do many press interviews around the album. Possibly, he was keen not to get into specifics around his lyrics. But, joining us on Zoom, dressed down in singlet and off-duty beard, he agreed to spare some time for MOJO's Best Of 2023 presentation…

Congratulations, Damon – *The Ballad Of Darren* is MOJO's Album Of The Year.

Thank you! It's gone down very well with the 50-plus crowd. Which I think is appropriate, really. It's a record that sort of delves into what it's like to be 55. There's a lot of young people who, in one way or another, have got into Blur recently, but this record is overwhelmingly a ‘mature record', as they say (*smiles*).

You know, it's a lovely thing to be able to do lots of different things. Right now I'm deep in research for a project I'm doing about Goethe's Magic Flute fragment [AKA The Magic Flute Part Two], which he wrote, sort of hoping that Mozart might set it to music, but Mozart died, and then he forgot about it. The point is, I like the contrast, and I suppose I get frustrated that people only see you as you are at that moment. But Blur was a great opportunity to reunite something that obviously completely defines who I am.

It made sense to make a record in the year you played shows…

For some of the other members of the band, there was necessity, somewhat. But for me, having just done two years of world touring with Gorillaz, it was more, You know what? I really fancy singing those songs again. Not for too long, not to overstate it, but I just felt like those songs could exist in 2023. Then it was, OK, where are we going to play? And it was, Let's play Wembley Stadium. It was something we hadn't done, something we'd dreamt of as kids. I mean, you couldn't even imagine you could be that big that you could play Wembley. Only people who were truly megastars played there.

The Live Aid aristocracy?

That kind of thing, yeah. ➢

> **“IT'S AN EMOTIONAL THING, BEING AT THIS AGE. OUR LIVES ARE NOT GETTING ANY LONGER.”**
> **DAMON ALBARN**

Reuben Bastienne-Lewis

Credit in here

Under a spell: Blur put their stamp on 2023 (from left) Graham Coxon, Alex James, Damon Albarn and Dave Rowntree.

Credit in here

Credit in here

And then while I was in America this time last year… I always take a little mobile studio, and a mobile engineer (*laughs*). Sam [Egglenton] has a very strange existence when he's on tour with me because he has to set up little mini studios in meeting rooms in dodgy hotels around America. And I just started writing, and then I realised, Oh right, I'm writing an album about myself and Blur. I came back in January and basically played them the whole record. Then we got [producer] James Ford involved and did it very quickly.

So in your mind you wrote these songs specifically as Blur songs?

As much as you ever *do*. Like, what I'm writing at the moment is actually for operatic voices. And I'm not writing in a way I would write with Blur, because I'm not sure that would really work (*laughs*). But a song's a song really. It comes from somewhere inside you, and I suppose it can go anywhere after that. But these songs clearly were highly personal. And for someone who is normally quite obtuse and coded about everything, they were a lot more open than previously. And everyone responded really well to them. It requires Graham to completely embrace it for it to move forward as Blur.

Is there something else, other than the four of you playing on it, that makes it Blur? I ask, because these are classic pop tunes, and you don't always write like that…

No, and it's kind of weird, because you don't expect men in their middle fifties to write *tunes*. That's supposed to have long abandoned you (*laughs*). But yeah, we talked about it initially and decided there was no way of doing this without going back to the four of us in my parents' garage in rural Essex. It's got to go back that far. And we were very aware that we didn't want to put too much embellishment on it.

When it came to the live show, we made a decision that we weren't going to have any extra musicians – with the exception of the London Community Gospel Choir, but they're already part of it, they're on the original records. If the songs are not good enough for us just to play with the four of us, with no fancy stuff on top, no fancy visuals, no nothing, then what's the point in doing this? And we're lucky we've got songs that work like that. And we applied the same principle to making the new record.

You've said recording went quickly. Did it help to have the deadline of shows?

It was quick because we *are* quick and also we had a blueprint. I had done a whole set of demos of the whole record. And they sounded good already, so it could only get better. That was the exciting bit. Let's really put the Blur stamp on it and let's get on with it. And we did.

The opening song, The Ballad, has this long history. Called Half A Song, it was a fragment on a limited edition solo album you put out in 2003 [*Democrazy*]. Your semi-legendary security guy, 'Smoggy', was always on at you to finish it…

Yeah, all the bloody time! I just thought, OK, Fuck it, sod it, I'm gonna finish it and shut him up. It's very hard, though, to add to something you've done and know in that form, and everyone who likes it is really familiar with. I even found out that my daughter [Missy, 23] liked it. She said, "I love that song." She'd never told me before.

Sometimes a 'fragment' is a thing in itself…

Yes. Sometimes I think I would like to exist in a series of fragments. But, you know, the world demands that you try and stick 'em all together and create pictures. But yes, I did think, with Half A Song, how can I turn it into the flag, the flagship of this record? So *The Ballad Of Darren* really came from that, because Smog's name is Darren Evans.

I'd always presumed he was born 'Smog'…

Yeah! For a while the cover was going to be this picture of Smog unconscious in about 1994 on a sofa. But we changed our mind on that.

Tell MOJO's readers something about Smog that can be printed.

Well, I met Stuart Lowbridge and Darren Evans at Dudley JBs in 1990. It was the first gig that Blur actually saw real money afterwards. Because in those days, if you *really* sold out a venue, there'd be a bonus. I think we earned something like an extra 500 quid. So 125 quid each. It was a lot of money for us. We indulged in several Ginsters on the way back.

But the point is, back in those heady days of baggy music and stuff, there was a real sense of the audience and the band were one. I kind of remember *everyone* in the club getting on the stage and starting to dance with us. It wasn't a very big place. But I think it was the first time it had ever happened. And as the crowd dispersed at the end of the show, Smog and Stu stayed around and we ended up getting to know them. And we've been best friends ever since really.

Smog's *big*. A big lad. But he's unconventionally hard because he wears glasses. Stu started working for us first as a tech and then more as a kind of musical director kind of role. And Smog took care of security for years, and still does really. But the nice thing about them is that they always maintained another life in Wolverhampton with their own jobs. So, it's always been very much a friends-first relationship.

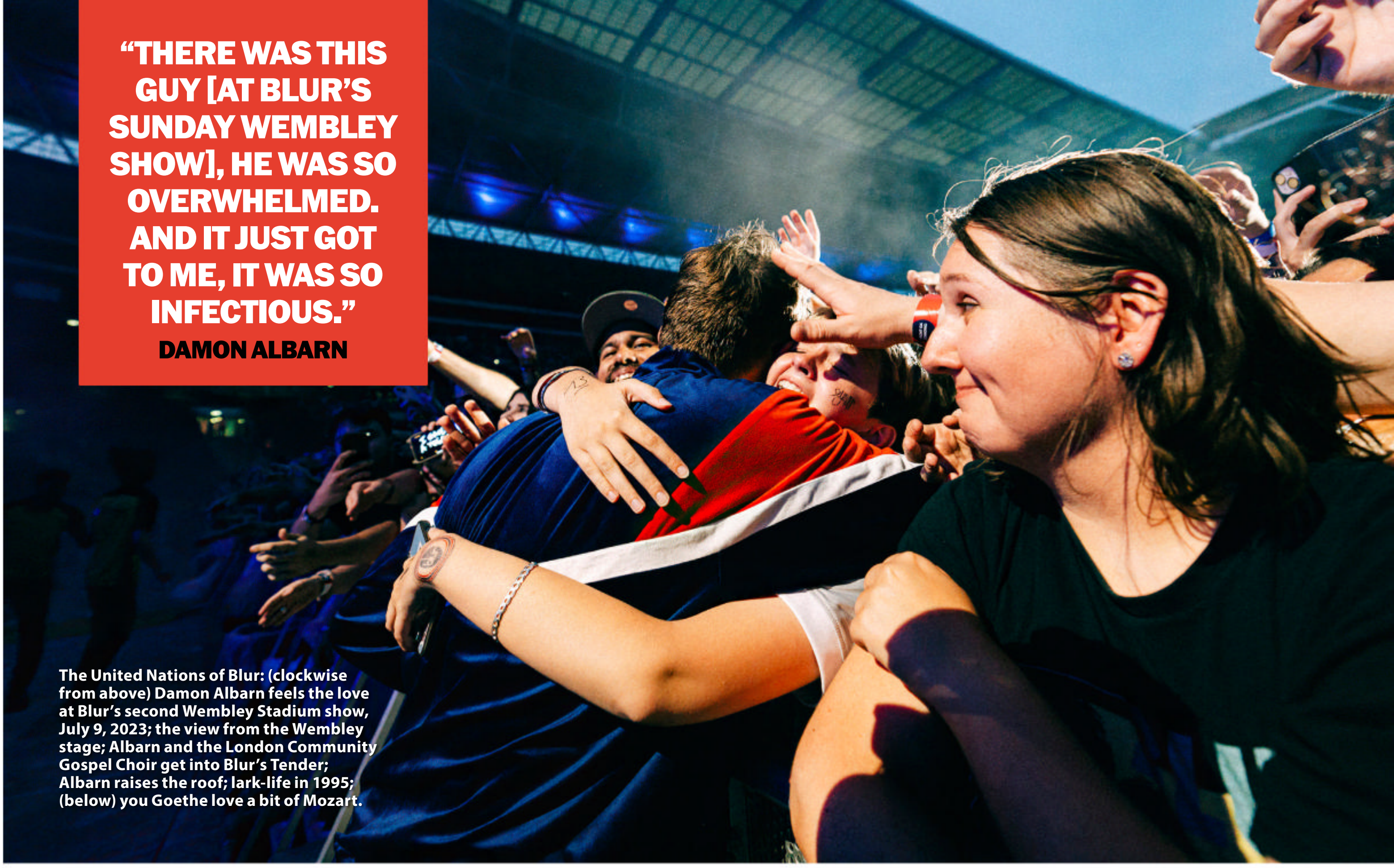
This year's Blur shows turned out to be quite emotional. For the fans but also for you. On the Sunday Wembley show, you could barely stop crying…

God, that was insane. That was like a dream, that one. We did Saturday, and I was like, Thank fuck, we've done it. It was good. That night, I did have a few drinks, but nothing crazy, because I knew I had to do Sunday. And I got up and I just was not up for it at all. In a really bad mood – just like, I don't want to do this. I want to go home and forget about all of this. And then, I don't know, something happened. And I completely forgot all about that when I got on-stage, and it was one of the most amazing things I've ever done.

What sparked that? Was it about your connection with the audience? Was it about your connection with your former selves in the songs?

It was all of it. It's an emotional thing, being at this age. Our lives are not getting any longer. Younger people who were there can appreciate the event. They've got their perception of it and its context

Blair Brown, M Pallant, Phoebe Fox, Kevin Westenberg



"THERE WAS THIS GUY [AT BLUR'S SUNDAY WEMBLEY SHOW], HE WAS SO OVERWHELMED. AND IT JUST GOT TO ME, IT WAS SO INFECTIOUS."

DAMON ALBARN

The United Nations of Blur: (clockwise from above) Damon Albarn feels the love at Blur's second Wembley Stadium show, July 9, 2023; the view from the Wembley stage; Albarn and the London Community Gospel Choir get into Blur's Tender; Albarn raises the roof; lark-life in 1995; (below) you Goethe love a bit of Mozart.

within their lives. But for us, it's like time travel in a way.

It must be amazing to get that wave of feeling off an audience, but can it be overwhelming? A bit scary?

There was one point on the Sunday. There was this guy, bless him, I'm not sure where he was from – it was the United Nations in the front row. I think it was Uruguay or Argentina. He was so overwhelmed. And people around him were like, consoling him and he was in bits. I don't know, whether it was sadness, or joy or whatever. And it just got to me, it was so infectious. But there's another 80,000 people there, and there's huge screens, so I had to pull myself together. But I love it when it's like that. Because you can't fake that.

The Narcissist is one of the songs on *The Ballad Of Darren* that reflects on your journey as a band…

Yes, it is. It is that journey really. For me it's a search for the thing that put me under this spell in the first place. And I suppose it goes back to me sitting in my room with the old strobe light that my dad had given me. I don't know whether you should give kids scientific-quality strobe lights, but he had this thing from when he worked with the guys who did lights for Pink Floyd at the UFO club, the Boyle Family. So it had that mythology about it. It was this big old metal thing, and every time it strobed it ticked as well. Could have killed me, probably, but we were more stupid then, weren't we? Smoking carriages on the tube, no seatbelts, and teenagers with strobe lights…

So anyway, I had this strobe light, a monophonic synthesizer and a mirror and I'd switch the lights off and play my records and pretend I was in the bands on Top Of The Pops. Just fantasise in my room. That's how it started.

There is a narcissism to that. Although of course, everyone's a narcissist now – it's one of the tropes of modern life. Anyway, the song starts at that point, and then travels through these moments. Of course, you have to be quite selective in three and a half minutes (*chuckles*)…

It's a condensed diary of a search for transcendence…

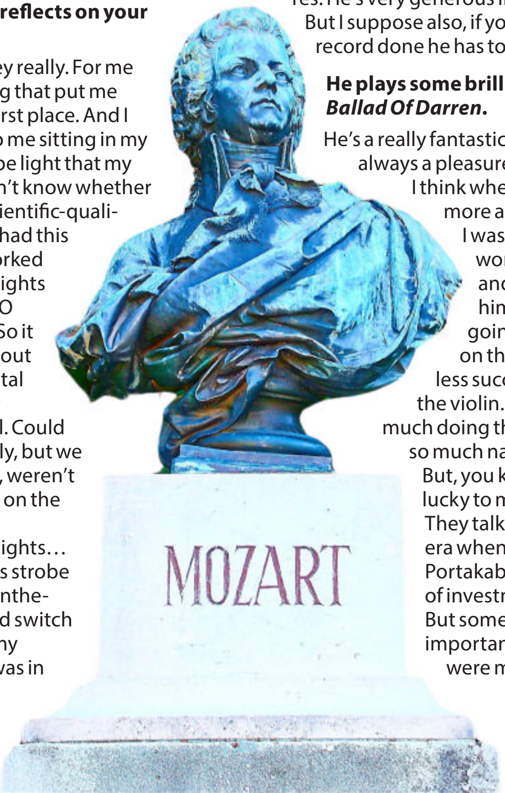
Yeah. That's my daily goal really. I try to start the day with yoga every day, down in the wilds of Devon. I put great import on that quality in music. It seems like one of the only things in a mad world that really, truly make sense to me.

You said Graham has to invest in your songs for them to become Blur…

Yes. He's very generous like that. He really is. But I suppose also, if you're gonna get a Blur record done he has to do that.

He plays some brilliant things on *The Ballad Of Darren*.

He's a really fantastic musician, and it's always a pleasure to play with him. I think when we started he was more accomplished than I was but I think I've worked really, really hard and I can keep up with him now. I was sort of going through my exams on the piano and violin, less successfully on the violin. And he wasn't so much doing that, but he just had so much natural music in him. But, you know, we were very lucky to meet each other. They talk about it as a terrible era when kids were put in Portakabins because of lack of investment in education. But some of my most important decisions in life were made in Portakabins.



M Pallant, Alamy

What's the best thing you've heard all year?

At the moment, I'm really just listening to 18th century German music, bit of French, trying to get my head around Mozart.

That's a big project. Lots of Ks to get through…

Blimey, yeah, how do you start? You don't start at the beginning… But in terms of contemporary music… I'm listening to a lot of reggaeton. And the thing that I love the most that's new is Peso Pluma. He's this Mexican, young kid who's just won eight Latin Grammys. He plays this kind of music that speaks of gang life, but it's very musical. It has accordions, trumpets, lovely melodies. Got a great voice. Everyone should check that out…

…and Mozart.

…And Mozart. And Gluck. And Monteverdi. Wonderful. Mozart was kind of the end of my classical training. I was playing a Mozart sonata, for my Grade 8. And I got so lost in a little chord sequence in the middle of it. And that turned into writing songs with three chords and stuff. I stopped, literally in my tracks. Go back there. Cut that. That's it.

I remember my dad going, "What are you doing? You're not practising," and I was going, "I'm very moved by this." It touched me so deeply. I suppose my journey this year is to re-find that point where I stopped.

We'll look forward to that, then – the people who loved your Dr Dee music.

I start my new year doing workshops with actual operatic singers. That's a really big leap but fuck it. I've got this great theatre on the Champs-Élysées that's been renovated and I'm kind of opening it. It's called the Lido. And it's an old, old cabaret theatre, where everything has to come up from the ground because it's low ceilings. So it's got incredible water features and mad stuff that no other theatre in the world has. And I like the idea of it being opera in a cabaret theatre because it's like Berlin in the 1930s. And it seems like we're entering that era again.

The Best Reissues Of 2023

Coming of age: Betty Davis's psychedelically funky solo debut turned 50 this year.

20

VARIOUS

Wattstax '72: The Complete Concert

(CRAFT)

A fantastic year for Stax fans kicked off with this definitive 12-CD overview of the 1972 LA festival – overtures, stage announcements and all. Come for the uplifting Staples, stay for deeper dives into the label's roster, like Lee Sain's Them Hot Pants.

19

NIRVANA
IN UTERO

NIRVANA

In Utero

(GEFFEN/UME)

The final Nirvana album's 30th anniversary was marked by a box that accommodated two great, unreleased West Coast shows from December '93 and January '94. Also included: much replica memorabilia, notably a 3D mobile of the album cover art angel.

18

HAWKWIND

Space Ritual

(ATOMHENGE/CHERRY RED)

"When we mixed it I think we all took LSD, which is why the original's a bit messy," Dave Brock told MOJO of Hawkwind's seminal 1973 live album. But besides new mixes, this 11-disc set included three full shows from the Space Ritual tour.

17

DE LA SOUL

3 Feet High And Rising

(CHRYSALIS)

Long unavailable – until recently De La Soul weren't even on streaming services – the hip-hop pioneers' catalogue resurfaced, headed by this magical 1989 debut. Poignant, too: Dave 'Trugoy' Jolicoeur died in February, just as his music was reissued.

16

LITTLE FEAT

Dixie Chicken

(RHINO)

After last year's valuable reissue of 1978's *Waiting For Columbus*, Rhino bulked out Lowell George and co's second and third albums. MOJO's pick, narrowly, was for 1973's *Dixie Chicken* over '72's *Sailin' Shoes*, with outtakes and a killer Boston '73 gig.

15

THE BREEDERS

Last Splash

(4AD)

Another 30th anniversary memento from grunge and alt-rock's high summer. Crisply remastered from tapes presumed lost, The Breeders' fuzzy *joie de vivre* remained infectious. And among the extras, a real treasure: Divine Hammer sung by J Mascis.

14

JOE GIBBS
& THE PROFESSIONALS

JOE GIBBS & THE PROFESSIONALS

The 1970s Dub Albums Collection

(DOCTOR BIRD)

Jamaican producer Gibbs was a foundational influence on UK punk, if perhaps undervalued next to Lee Perry and King Tubby. The year's essential reggae box reasserted his case, with his '70s dub output on four CDs.

13

TOM WAITS
RAIN DOGS

TOM WAITS

Rain Dogs

(ISLAND)

Tom's Carny Years revisited, as Waits and Kathleen Brennan began a remastering of their Island period. Out of the first tranche – alongside *Swordfishtrombones* (1983) and *Franks Wild Years* (1987) – this 1985 odyssey was the MOJO bourbon jockeys' selection.

12

SPARKLEHORSE

Bird Machine

(ANTI-)

A meticulously constructed, sensitively managed, entirely plausible attempt at building the fifth Sparklehorse album, from 2009 sessions left behind by Mark Linkous when he died in 2010. These 14 tracks were cranky, atmospheric, dynamic and up there with Linkous's very best.

11

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES

Culture Bunker 1978-82

(UNIVERSAL)

Julian Cope finally opened up his vaults to help compile this 6-CD trove of singles, demos and live tracks (57 unreleased); the deep dive the ever-mutating Teardrops deserved. Most noteworthy: kosmische demos for their doomed third album.

10

FUN BOY THREE

The Complete Fun Boy Three

(CHRYSALIS)

The brief, glorious, unerringly deadpan life of the post-Specials popsters captured *in toto*: 69 tracks (including unheard outtakes) across five CDs, plus a DVD featuring an antic Terry Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple show from '83 at the Regal Theatre, Hitchin.

9

THE WHO

Who's Next/ Life House

(UMR)

"One thousand interviews I've done about Life House," Pete Townshend told MOJO, returning to the aborted project that's haunted him for over 50 years. This time, it came added to a *Who's Next* refit: 89 unreleased tracks and a brand new manifestation – a Life House graphic novel!

8

BETTY
DAVIS

BETTY DAVIS

Betty Davis

(LIGHT IN THE ATTIC)

A crucial figure in the late-'60s/early-'70s crucible of rock, soul and jazz, Davis's ultra-nasty, psychedelically funky solo debut only gained importance with age, remastered for its 50th anniversary. Also available: three more Davis LPs, with one, from 1979, previously unreleased.

7

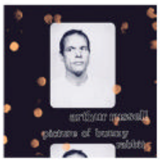
NEIL YOUNG

Chrome Dreams

(REPRISE)

This legendary artefact stood out from 2023's Neil archive glut, notwithstanding *Ragged Glory* expansions et al. Shelved in 1977, much of *Chrome Dreams* had already been released, but together it emerged as an all-time classic. One surprise: Ronnie Wood's cover art.

6



ARTHUR RUSSELL

Picture Of Bunny Rabbit

(AUDIKA/ROUGH TRADE)

Over 30 years since his death, the archive of unreleased Russell kept dispensing classics, this one from the same period as his 1986 landmark, *World Of Echo*: cello sighs and scrapes, ghostly murmurs, rendered minimally but with sacred heft.

5

WRITTEN IN THEIR SOUL:

VARIOUS

Written In Their Soul: The Stax Songwriter Demos

(CRAFT)

An incredible find: 149 demos (140 unheard) from the Stax vaults, recasting familiar hits and revealing lost gems. Also recommended: the *Stax Uncovered* sampler that came with MOJO 357, including Mack Rice's pulsating prototype of Respect Yourself.

4

PHAROAH SANDERS

Pharoah

(LUAKA BOP)

A holy grail for spiritual jazz fans, Sanders' 1977 album (AKA *Harvest Time*) had only been available as a bootleg for decades before this expansive reissue. A serene rather than fiery career highlight, usefully augmented by live tracks.

3

Joni Mitchell

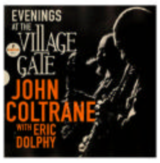
JONI MITCHELL

Archives Vol. 3: The Asylum Years (1972-1975)

(RHINO)

Five CDs plotted Mitchell's trajectory through *For The Roses*, *Court And Spark* and *The Hissing Of Summer Lawns*. Among the myriad revelations: a gorgeous alternate take on You Turn Me On I'm A Radio backed by Neil Young & The Stray Gators.

2



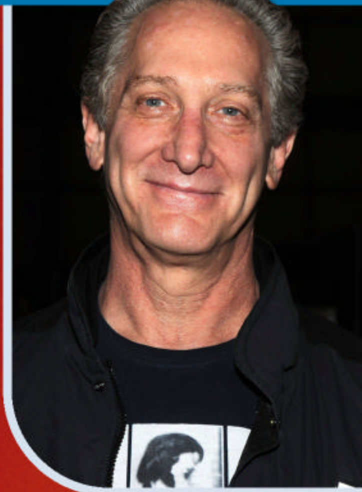
JOHN COLTRANE & ERIC DOLPHY

Evenings At The Village Gate

(IMPULSE!)

Unheard jazz gigs proliferated in 2023, including sets by Ahmad Jamal and Nina Simone. But nothing touched the epiphanic power of Coltrane's quintet with Dolphy, McCoy Tyner, Elvin Jones and Reggie Workman. A jazz revolution, live and direct from 1961.

Mel Dixon/Courtesy of Light In The Attic



Mind boggling: (left) Bob Dylan’s *Time Out Of Mind* was remixed by (above) Michael Brauer on *Fragments* – “a broken and fascinating road map.”

BOB DYLAN FRAGMENTS
TIME OUT OF MIND SESSIONS (1996-1997)
THE BOOTLEG SERIES VOL. 17

“Dylan’s Story Became Much More Pronounced”

1

BOB DYLAN

The Bootleg Series Vol. 17: Fragments – Time Out Of Mind Sessions (1996–1997)

(COLUMBIA)

A de-mixed *Time Out Of Mind* and its outtakes opened up a world of wonder in 2023. By Grayson Haver Currin.

IN THE SPRING of 2022, Michael Brauer invited a neighbour to his home studio in New York’s Catskill Mountains to listen to the record he’d just finished mixing. Brauer had mixed hundreds of records across three decades, *bona fide* hits by the likes of Coldplay, John Mayer and Angélique Kidjo. But this time, Brauer was nervous, because he’d actually remixed a masterpiece – Bob Dylan’s 1997 resurrection, *Time Out Of Mind*. His neighbour knew not only every word but also every guitar squeak and drum hit. Brauer worried he’d ruined it.

“When the producers first asked me to remix it, my first question was, Why would I want to touch this record? No fucking way,” says Brauer. “I’ll get drilled for trying to do this. There’s no way I should touch this record, because it shouldn’t be touched.’”

But as they sat in Brauer’s home, his neighbour, John Raffaele, beamed. It was crisp and wonderful, he repeated, and he could hear and understand Dylan’s tale – the heartbroken, lovesick saga at *Time Out Of Mind*’s twilit centre – more clearly than ever. Brauer could breathe easily again, because that had been his charge: to lift the music from the shadowy, ineffable depths favoured by original producer Daniel Lanois and position Dylan at the centre of his own saga. “They wanted to see what it was like if it was scaled-down, simpler, so you could hear Bob better,” says Brauer. “His story became much more pronounced and obvious.”

Brauer’s revelatory work was the anchor of *Fragments*, Volume 17 in Dylan’s long-running *Bootleg Series* and a full excavation of the massive effort that prompted his popular reintroduction – entailing Grammys, bigger tours, an unbroken streak of intriguing albums ever since. “*Time Out Of Mind* was the first time in many years I became a fan again,” as Brauer puts it, his experience echoing that of many.

> **“WHEN THE PRODUCERS ASKED ME TO REMIX IT, MY FIRST QUESTION WAS, WHY WOULD I WANT TO TOUCH THIS RECORD? NO FUCKING WAY.”**
>
> **MICHAEL BRAUER**

WHEN DYLAN arrived at Miami’s legendary Criteria in 1996, the core of his career seemed far behind him. He had passed from his ecclesiastical ’80s to make two covers albums that suggested a flicker of the flame that, in the late ’60s, lit the basement of Big Pink. He loved, however, the sample-heavy records of Beck and, as always, obdurate blues; after he read Lanois his sad-eyed lyrics in a New York hotel room, they began hatching an approach that might combine the two and afford Dylan a new sonic vantage.

Those sessions, though, were fraught. The big band was astounding, with two drummers (Jim Keltner and Brian Blade), a horde of guitarists, and Southern keyboard-and-vibes legends Augie Meyers and Jim Dickinson. Tension loomed, as Dylan and Lanois chased different interpretations of the blues through takes that constantly upended how entire songs sounded. The bevy of alternate versions on *Fragments* suggested the tirelessness of Dylan, Lanois, and their ensemble, with the unifying belief that they could deal with the chaos to pursue the songs in which they both believed. In the end, of course, they reached a renaissance; *Fragments* was their broken and fascinating road map.

But *Fragments* did more than look backward to reveal the labour, strife, and perseverance that led to *Time Out Of Mind*. It turned forward, too, to chronicle Dylan and his expansive band playing this material over the course of three years, from Atlantic City to Oslo. You could hear a mischief in his voice as he shuffled lyrics in Highlands, hear a wonder in his playing as his crew recast Make You Feel My Love as an acoustic moan. If the mid-’90s supposition was that Dylan was done, the mid-’20s question seems to be: will he ever be finished, writing and touring and re-imagining his own canon? You could hear that frameshift happen here, on *Fragments*, and can witness it yourself the next time Dylan visits your town. Ⓜ

Randee St. Nicholas, Getty

“The Best Thing I’ve Heard All Year”

THE MAKERS OF OUR BEST ALBUMS OF 2023 ON THE MUSIC THAT BLEW *THEM* AWAY.

AROOJ AFTAB

Diva of Ghazal jazz-pop fusion.

As I was watching the **George Michael** documentary on a flight, I realised I hadn’t listened to him since the ’90s, so I went back to *Older*. It’s so beautiful and emotional, and his songwriting – The Strangest Thing and You Have Been Loved… I had it on repeat for weeks. **Chocolate Genius** is a singer-songwriter, almost indie rock but neo-soul-adjacent: he co-wrote a song on my next album, and I thought I’d heard everything of his but actually not his album *Black Music* from 1998, which has some absolute gems. I loved **Henry Threadgill**’s book, Easily Slip Into Another World, which is like a treasure trove. He writes about growing up in Chicago listening to these jazz legends, like Sonny Rollins, and again, I realised I didn’t know his 1997 album *Where’s Your Cup?* – all these late-’90s discoveries! It has amazing accordion and harmonium, woven sections into alto sax through to electric guitar and fretless bass; it’s an essential part of his discography. One discovery in 2023 was **Amaarae**’s album *Fountain Baby* (sleeve above). She’s Ghanaian-American, fusing Afrobeats, R&B and pop. Afrobeats is a current fad but this is no fad; it’s innovative and unique, with catchy lyrics that are also thought-provoking.

IAN HUNTER

Mott’s rock’n’roll diarist.

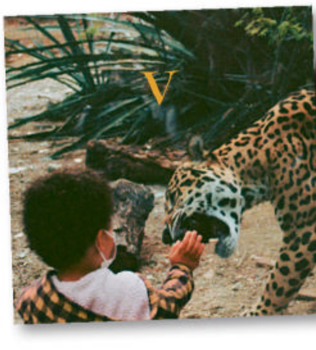
What I’ve heard of the new **Stones** record sounds magnificent. The gospel song with Lady Gaga – Sweet Sounds Of Heaven – plus the production by Andrew Watt – *huge*. The Angry video is one of those ideas you really wish you’d thought of – brilliant!

Bill Janovitz has written a great book on **Leon Russell**. I’ve always been Leon’s number one fan – well, there’s a few of us. This book is so complete – warts and all – fascinating stuff. Took me a week to get through it. Listen to In The Ghetto on the first Delaney & Bonnie record – that’s Leon. Listen to Dylan’s Watchin’ The River Flow – that’s Leon – gospel rock – nobody could touch you like Leon.

JAMES HOLDEN

Electro psych’s lode star goes Italo-prog!

The best new thing I heard all year is the band **Smote**. Perhaps I discovered their records the year before, but I heard them live this year in a tiny loud venue and that was the best thing. Imagine Popol Vuh going hard, all their mystical quasi-religious pomp turned to thundering doomy trudge, pure pagan magick. And the best old thing I discovered this year came when I was lucky enough to play in Milo, Sicily, the former home of Italian legend **Franco Battiato**. Check out his 1974 record, *Clic*. It crosses dreamy Krautish trances with bizarre Dada-*concrète* interventions and too-brief snatches of heartbreak-beautiful songs.



KAYUS BANKOLE

A third of Young Fathers likes his gospel unvarnished.

Numero Group put out this amazing album from the ’70s: *Everything – God Is Love ’78* by **Otis G. Johnson**. There’s just something about it that works, like *really* works. Putting any ideas of God aside and just listening to the intensity and nonchalant passion, you are immediately sucked in. It’s like Otis said a big ‘fuck you’ to vocal acrobatics and over-indulgent noise. Feeling reigns supreme, whilst each bum note speaks volumes and resonates deep within your soul. With all of that said, there is still a sense of calm and tranquillity that has allowed this album to be the soundtrack to my travels, weirdly making sense in every environment, whether happy or sad, gazing into the distance, taking in beautiful sceneries or the extreme boredom while waiting for endless delayed flights. From travelling over the bridge in San Francisco or back home in rainy Scotland, this has been my record of the year.

BILLY NOMATES

Tor Maries opts for some “ upbeat bleak”.

It seems there is so much new music, I personally find it hard to look at any at all. I’m late to every party and if somebody tells me to come, I won’t go. An album I’ve had on repeat is **Jim O’Rourke** – *Insignificance*. Released in 2001 but this year was my first time hearing his work. I feel more connected to that album than anything I’ve ever heard. It’s complex, calm but bleak, raucous but less. I think it’s incredible and has aged very well. **Unknown Mortal Orchestra**’s *V* album came out this year. I heard the single, That Life, while I was walking round a charity shop in France. I thought it was one of those unknown brilliant hit songs from the late ’70s. I know every word, and the puppet dance from the video. **Gazelle Twin** releases her new album – *Black Dog* – imminently. It sounds genuinely haunted. What she makes is totally unique and unlike anything else. I also discovered **Joe Jackson**’s [1982] album *Night And Day*. Upbeat bleak, it’s also aged very well. His lyrics and delivery are great. My soundman Ed blasted that album on long drives, I’ve become a fan.

Billy Nomates, AKA Tor Maries, happy to be late to the party; (left) Unknown Mortal Orchestra’s *V* LP, one of her picks.

DOT ALLISON Consciousology

PAUL WELLER

Because it’s not BTIHAY without him.

Dot Allison’s *Consciousology* is such a beautiful album with an amazing atmosphere and arrangements. I think it’s Dot’s masterwork, actually. The brilliant Hannah Peel did the string arrangements, too. It takes me off to a better place – just incredible. Another album that really got me was *The Circling Sun* by **Spirits** – Piya Malik from Say She She put me onto it. It’s beautiful, spiritual jazz from this New Zealand group, with some Alice Coltrane influence. Then there was *Turn The Car Around* by **Gaz Coombes**. I’ve loved all of Gaz’s solo work. Out of all the ’90s Britpop artists, for me it’s only been Gaz, Damon and Noel that have produced great work consistently. Singles, as I still call ’em… I loved **Blur**’s The Narcissist. If You Don’t Want My Love by **Jalen Ngonda** – he’s a soul guy with a beautiful falsetto. He’s from the States but lives in Liverpool and records on Daptone. Alive! by **Bakar**. Just Cool by **Obongjayar**. And Crown by **Samory I**. He’s my favourite reggae vocalist. He’s so good and I hope he gets his time soon.

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL

Ben’n’Trace lace up their dancing shoes.

BEN WATT: I spent a lot of the year listening to lots of experimental and freeform stuff. Albums that I have returned to

Blythe Thomas, Ross Halfin, Laura Lewis

Everything But The Girl's Ben Watt and Tracey Thorn: digging experimental stuff and soulful protest ballads.

are *Atlas* by **Laurel Halo** and *MPU103* by **MPU101**. Upbeat singles included August Again by **Kiefer**, and The Rapture Pt III by **&ME, Black Coffee, Keinemusik**.

TRACEY THORN: I really liked the **Anohni And The Johnsons** album, *My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross*. The lead track, It Must Change, is a gorgeous soulful protest ballad with the best vocal performance I heard this year. I also loved **Beverly Glenn-Copeland**'s song Harbour (Song for Elizabeth) from *The Ones Ahead*, and on a more dancefloor vibe, Wespennest (feat. Sophia Kennedy) by **DJ Koze**.

BC CAMPLIGHT

The soundtrack to Brian Christinzio's unusually upbeat year.

When I was in the US this year, I saw my friend Jacy, who owns the Philadelphia Record Exchange, who played me **Dungen**'s album *4* [2008], and, fucking God, how have I never heard them before? It's everything I love about music; it feels very real, full of chaotic ideas and shifts in style, from gloomy jazz to heavy psych to almost new wave-y stuff, but never gratuitously. It's ridiculously intelligent music too, with prodigious, mad guitar.

I can't tell if it's the music or because it was the soundtrack to a new relationship, but **Andy Shauf**'s *Norm* has been big. It's like Paul Simon singing Van Dyke Parks songs. The vocals are so delicate you almost think, Give it some welly! But you're glad he doesn't.

I like music where the artist doesn't feel like they have to fill in every gap. A little like the new **Mitski** album *The Land Is Inhospitable, And So Are We*. It's like an artist with 2023 sensibilities made *Smile*. She doesn't let hooks hang around too long, and she doesn't give it to you on a silver platter. It's like, Follow me if you want, otherwise, fuck off.

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER

MC Taylor is jumping for joy, and grief, and hope.

Over the past few months I've fallen really hard for **Julie Byrne**'s album *The Greater Wings*. I really loved her previous album, *Not Even Happiness*, but this one is an emotional deepening and widening, somehow even more intimate than her previous recordings. Every time I hear it I process it a little more. It's an unending meditation on grief and hope. I also loved **Sam Burton**'s latest album *Dear Departed* (below, left), a collection of music he recorded in Topanga Canyon with Jonathan Wilson. Sam and Jonathan seemed to drill down really deep into the sort of lush orchestration that one might find on a Jimmy Webb record, but it sounds genuine and affecting. I particularly love the tune Empty Handed, which soundtracked a lot of driving around western Massachusetts back in the spring of 2023. In terms of older music, I spent a lot of time in 2023 with the music of **Horace Tapscott**, a jazz pianist and composer who founded the Pan Afrikan Peoples Arkestra in 1961 in South Central Los Angeles. His records are endlessly rewarding and heavy.

ROBERT FORSTER

Go-Between dreams of SunYears, and J.J. Cale.

It's been a busy year, so it's songs for me. **Bar Italia** are a slippery melodic pop group: Nurse! and Jelsy are great. **P.J. Harvey**'s A Child's Question, August: "love me tender, tender love." Swedish singer-songwriter Peter Morén from Peter Bjorn And John has a new band, **SunYears**: Come Fetch My Soul is a lovely song. **Mitski**'s Bug Like An Angel is a big quiet/loud/quiet/loud explosion. **Paul Weller**, whom I have followed since *All Mod Cons*, has been playing a new song, Take, that's very strong. Looking back at albums, **Leonard Cohen**'s *You Want It Darker* – his last testament, from 2016, stood out. From last year, ex-Servants singer **David Westlake**'s *My Beautiful England* is beautiful. And I heard a song drift over a park in Stockholm in early August, a shimmering minimal blues pop track that I found to my pleasant surprise was Cherry by **J.J. Cale**.

LEONARD COHEN
YOU WANT IT DARKER

➢

Graham Tolbert, Bleddyn Butcher, Edward Bishop

"The Best Thing I've Heard All Year"

Lucy Dacus, she enjoys a Japanese Breakfast.

Fatoumata Diawara: finding peace with Joy's *Amabutho* LP.

RACHEL GOSWELL

For the Slowdive siren, Shithouse do the business.

Shithouse is my favourite track this year. It's the debut single from the Brummie duo **Big Special**, singer Joe [Hicklin] and drummer Cal [Moloney]. Joe's an incredible lyricist, like a poet laureate, and musically it's really energetic, shouty and in-your-face. People might compare them to Sleaford Mods but it's got guitars and bass as well as drums, and melodic singing too. I also love **Pale Blue Eyes**' album *This House* (above). They opened for Slowdive at our pre-Glastonbury show in Exeter, and they brought the house down. Synths play a massive part in their sound, even more than the guitars, and the songs are great. They encompass loss and grief, after [singer/guitarist] Matt's mum died, which I can empathise with, because I lost my own mum during the first lockdown. I want to include **Lanterns On The Lake**'s album *Versions Of Us*, too. It's not shoegaze, or even dreampop; I really don't know how to categorise them. But it's also full of great songs, and the singer Hazel is really talented.

GAZ COOMBES

Supergrass's solo star gets his mind blown. Alright!

Domi And JD Beck are a fascinating band. I was aware of a buzz around them but didn't know much about them, so when I saw they were on the bill at Primavera on the same day I was playing, I made sure to go and give them a watch. They were just bonkers. It was a brilliant performance. Their chemistry and tightness on-stage was insane, it wasn't like anything I'd seen before. When they kicked into a track I remember thinking, How the fuck to they do that? It's this incredibly technical new-school jazz. It's pretty mind-blowing stuff.

There's another band I discovered called **The Bug Club**. I heard this track called Love Is A Painting and I thought it was brilliant. I loved the cheeky throwaway approach of the track and the whole album [2022's *Green Dream In F#*] too. It totally tapped into the vibe I remember having as a kid starting a band and being into Dinosaur Jr and The Lemonheads and Buzzcocks.

Gaz Coombes: the Weller favourite was caught by the buzz of Domi And JD Beck.

KASSA OVERALL

The rapper and jazz drummer digs his roots.

This year, [US rapper/producer] Ishmael Butler put me on to **Schoolly D**'s P.S.K. What Does It Mean? It's a song that influenced hip-hop in so many directions. It's technically the first gangsta rap song, and it influenced a whole style of rap. Then I learned that Schoolly D used the Roland TR-909 drum machine to make the beat – not the most common drum machine for hip-hop, but it's what I've been using, too. My favourite new music is F* TASTE by **Yoshi T**. I've always known Yoshi T had great potential, but this song proves it. He's having a breakout year.

CHRIS ABRAHAMS

The Necks' piano man mines for minimalism.

In terms of the sort of thing I do, I really liked **Scott Morgan**'s album as **Loscil/Lawrence English**, *Colours Of Air*. A large part of it is recordings from the old museum building in Brisbane. It's a really beautiful ambient record. **Tim Hecker**'s *No Highs* record was extraordinary – the production and the hugeness of it. More of a song-form record I liked was **Yo La Tengo**'s *This Stupid World*. I've always really liked their stuff. **Swans**' *The Beggar* was a fantastic record: really extraordinary playing, riff-based and so emotional. Great

Ingrid Pop, Shelby Duncan, Camille Walsh, Tom Cockram

guitar from Norman Westberg on one track.

Something I pulled out recently that I hadn't listened to for four decades was **Mal Waldron**'s *The Call*, from 1971. I listened to it as a teenager before I had any idea of jazz minimalism as a thing. Hearing it again it became obvious how influential it probably was on me. It's hypnotic, almost space rock. Mal Waldron plays piano. He was an ex-American military person who ended up staying on in Germany during the Cold War, left the army and stayed on as a musician. He played with people like Embryo and was connected with Tangerine Dream and also with Donna Summer quite early on, which is interesting. And he was Billie Holiday's last accompanist.

FATOUMATA DIAWARA

Taking Wassoulou to the world.

Six months ago, I discovered some artists from South Africa, their name is **Joy**. They're young, very fresh and super-talented. They sing a cappella, and their voices and their harmonies become all the instruments, including the bass and percussion. I listen to their album *Amabutho* every day, to relax my spirit, and be at peace with my soul, but it's very powerful music too.

LAWRENCE

Mozart Estate's pop fundamentalist.

Naturally **Lana Del Rey**, *Did You Know That There's A Tunnel Under Ocean Blvd*. She can't put a foot wrong. And I've been playing *Violet Bent Backwards Over The Grass*, the poetry album, all year as well, also *Pop 2* by **Charli XCX**, which had its first physical release, therefore a new album – lovely silver mirror sleeve.

It was a good year for live music for me too. **Sleaze** knocked me backwards; they're one of them south London bands – like a modern, really dirty version of pub rock, kind of Ian Dury, like you've walked in on someone's scene. Also, Ian Svenonius's band **Escape-ism** – the frontman of our age! Amazing clothes, a brilliant head of hair, a super-intelligent guy. And I found a great 7-inch, Birmingham [B-side of Stubborn As A Mule] by a band called **Quinceharmon**, from 1972. The singer's left Birmingham and he's missing it, ha ha! It doesn't make sense really. Typical Birmingham. They also did the theme to the On The Buses film.

SUSANNE SUNDFØR

Norway's queen of everything ethereal.

There's a new band from Sweden who are incredible called **Dina Ögon**. They released a gorgeous album this year called *Oas* that I've listened to a lot. My favourite track is Berget, but the whole album is brilliant. I think craftmanship is under appreciated today in music and I feel Dina Ögon really focus on that. The songs are exquisite, it's fantastic songwriting. She [singer Anna Ahnlund] is a great singer and the production is really elegant. Live, I've only seen my husband [**André Roligheten**] play this year and he always blows me away. He's a fantastic saxophone player, he's got his own album coming up and he also plays in a very good jazz band called **Gard Nilssen Acoustic Unity**. I know there's a conflict of interest there, but I really do think they're good!

JASON WILLIAMSON

Sleaford Mods' bard of grot.

My main one is **P.J. Harvey**'s new album, *I Inside The Old Year Dying*. I've never really listened to her to be honest, I don't know why, I just haven't, so out of desperation to hear something new I put it on and I haven't stopped listening to it. She's got a new fan. It really connects itself to the turbulent times without being too direct about it.

My other one would be **Mick Jenkins**' *The Patience*. He's one of these new rappers that's doing stuff that harks back to the Golden Age in the mid '90s, that kind of East Coast sound. He's part of that wave, people like Freddie Gibbs, who actually guests on this album along with Benny The Butcher. It's not revolutionary, but it's definitely real. It's street music.

AVEY TARE

Animal Collective's Soul Capturer on Ethio-grooves and synth-dirge.

I was familiar with the early Pyramids records from the 1970s but they totally caught me off-guard this year with their song Re-Memory from the album *Afro Futuristic Dreams* [released by **Idris Ackamoor & The Pyramids**]. It's probably my song of the year and it's been a great soundtrack to the transition into autumn. It's the perfect combination of Ethiopian groove-esque horn melodies over syncopated jazz percussion tracks that lead into group choral chants and melodies about love and relatives long gone and the cycle of rebirth. I find every part of it very pleasing. It's also a testament to an artist being able to create great music over a long period of time. I had never heard of **Randy & The Goats** until diving into the reissue of [1981 debut album] *On The Lam*. It's definitely of the Lou Reed-Velvet Underground ilk, but damaged in its own right, and well worth the ride. I especially like the bent synth dirge Stop It and the subtle beauty of Gate 17 (Let The Sun Shine) [both bonus tracks on the reissue], which is the perfect soundtrack to seeing the sunrise after a long night of God knows what.

IDRIS ACKAMOOR & THE PYRAMIDS
AFRO FUTURISTIC DREAMS

RÓISÍN MURPHY

Ex-Moloko weirdo loves space, filth, bass.

Earth Angel is a new project from my dear old pal Richard 'Parrot' Barratt, AKA **Crooked Man**, who produced *Roisin Machine* with me. The EP hinges on a kind of '80s street soul, UK bass sound. It is such a welcome change of pace, it's slower and has more space than the house tempo we all hear so much of. I love space, a bit of emptiness between the beats. It's like being back in 1988 and I love it!

Decius Vol. 1 by [Lias Saoudi collab] **Decius** is filthy, dirty, and very cool. It's the sound of the dark rooms and dark corners of club culture. Though it's electronic dance music, it's pure rock'n'roll, the purest you will find. It gives you feelings you shouldn't have and lets you see what you shouldn't see.

Somebody told me if I liked Syd Barrett then I would also like *Oar* by **Alexander 'Skip' Spence**. His arrangements are weird and freewheeling and he has a beautiful jazzy voice which makes the whole thing even more unusual. It's a record I play during working out. My trainer says I'm weird. Ⓜ

Interviews by Martin Aston, Jenny Bulley, Chris Catchpole, Ian Harrison

Swede thriller: Susanne Sundfør gives Dina Ögon the thumbs up.

P. P. Hartnett, Amy Grace, Nik Pate, Janne Rugland

It's the way that they do it: Fun Boy Three try something completely different, 1981 (from top) Neville Staple, Terry Hall, Lynval Golding.

MOJO EYEWITNESS

THE FUN BOY THREE TAKE OVER THE ASYLUM

Having just left The Specials, Terry Hall, Lynval Golding and Neville Staple burst into 1981 with pop-savvy proto trip-hop hits. Over in less than two meteoric years, their unique *oeuvre* took in a second LP produced by David Byrne, an all-female backing band, and sudden collapse when American success hung in the balance. "We needed to have fun," bandmates recall, one year on from Hall's untimely passing. "It was short and sweet, wasn't it?"

Interviews by **IAN HARRISON**

Terry Hall: We were heading into a really interesting area with the second Specials album [*More Specials*, 1980] but we just couldn't carry it on, 'cos of people's personalities, and because it had become too big, really.

Lynval Golding: We were having a break and the publisher gave me some money to go into the studio. So if you look at the Fun Boy Three, the songs were written while we were in The Specials. The Lunatics Have Taken Over The Asylum [November '81 FB3 debut] felt like the natural follow-up to [July '81 Specials Number 1] Ghost Town, but due to disagreements, we decided, OK, we'll just release it ourselves.

Neville Staple: It didn't seem like, Oh, let's start a new band. It was just, we're going to do something completely different. Like, in The Specials we wore suits, now we were wearing streetwear, casual stuff, y'know?

LG: Terry thought of the name. It's looking at it in a sarcastic way, a piss-take basically, because in the end it was quite stressful in ➢

IconicPix

Terry oh baby: (clockwise from left) Bananarama join the funhouse for Top Of The Pops, 1982 (from left) Keren Woodward, Staple, Sarah Dallin, Golding, Siobhan Fahey, Hall; FB3 "throwing ideas around" in the studio; the Fun Boys style it out during the video for Summertime, 1982.

> "THEY BURNED AN AMERICAN FLAG DURING OUR FIRST AMERICAN SHOW."
> NICKY HOLLAND

The Specials. We needed to have fun.

Siobhan Fahey: Nobody knew Bananarama at the time. We'd made a little indie single [Aie A Mwana], and Terry really liked it. At our first meeting he was as awkward and shy as us. He said, "We're making an album, we'd like you to do backing vocals." We were like, "We're not professional singers, you know that don't you?" and he said, "That's why I want to use you."

NS: They weren't musical, and with us starting a new album we complemented each other. We didn't have a clue what to do, really, but when it was the three of us in the band, it was easy to throw ideas around.

SF: It was a very unusual way of making records, I know now. There was just layers of all of us playing percussion in a kind of quite simple, childlike way. It was lots of fun, like a musical workshop. One day they said to us, "Can you do a bit of scat singing, like Cleo Laine?" Every time the green light went on to record we would just corpse and piss ourselves laughing, and they fell about laughing, and that's generally how our relationship went.

NS: That first album [*The Fun Boy Three*, UK Number 7, March 1982] is all percussion and guitar. Remember, the only person who could play an instrument was [guitarist] Lynval. It just came natural, the African beat, the dubby bits, the Jamaican-y feel. We didn't think, Right, let's do it this way because we want to be pop stars… If we thought that, we wouldn't have made that first album would we?

LG: The first FB3 album, I couldn't finish all the songs because I was in hospital. I got beat up in West Hampstead [in July 1980] and I got stabbed in Coventry [in January 1982]. It took me years to get over it. But I think it made me more determined to stand up and be the voice of those who got stabbed, you know? I just took it on.

THE FUN BOY THREE
FB3

THE FUN BOY THREE
Summertime
FB3

SF: The next single was It Ain't What You Do…, with us [Number 4, March '82]. We filmed the video in a tube station in south London, a freezing cold night shoot, and I remember much hilarity when Sarah [Dallin] was supposed to kiss Neville. And oh my God, the first time we did TOTP with them, it was mind-blowing.

LG: Back in the day, you'd say, Top Of The Pops? Oh, cool. We got used to it.

SF: Terry said, "If you want, we'll back you and produce your next record." We suggested Really Saying Something, which was our second Top 5 single [in April 1982]! Just by working with us they'd made us household names. They changed our lives, and I have nothing but love and gratitude for them.

Nicky Holland: I got a call from Rick Rogers, their manager, in maybe March '82. They were recording Summertime, and I arranged vocals and scored some strings for it. After we'd done Summertime [Number 18, August '82], they said they'd like to do an all-female band and could I help them put that together? It was sort of like The Supremes in reverse.

LG: At one point it was a Japanese all-female band he wanted. We talked about all kinds of things and 99 per cent of those ideas were Terry's. We couldn't get Brian Eno to produce [second LP] *Waiting*, so we thought, Who's the closest to him? David Byrne. Me and Terry went to New York to meet David at his apartment and had a good chat, and said, "This is workable."

TH: The second album was a bit more structured – David Byrne was someone I really admired.

NH: David always came at something from a different angle. One time he asked me to play the piano like I was "hitting a hot plate on the stove."

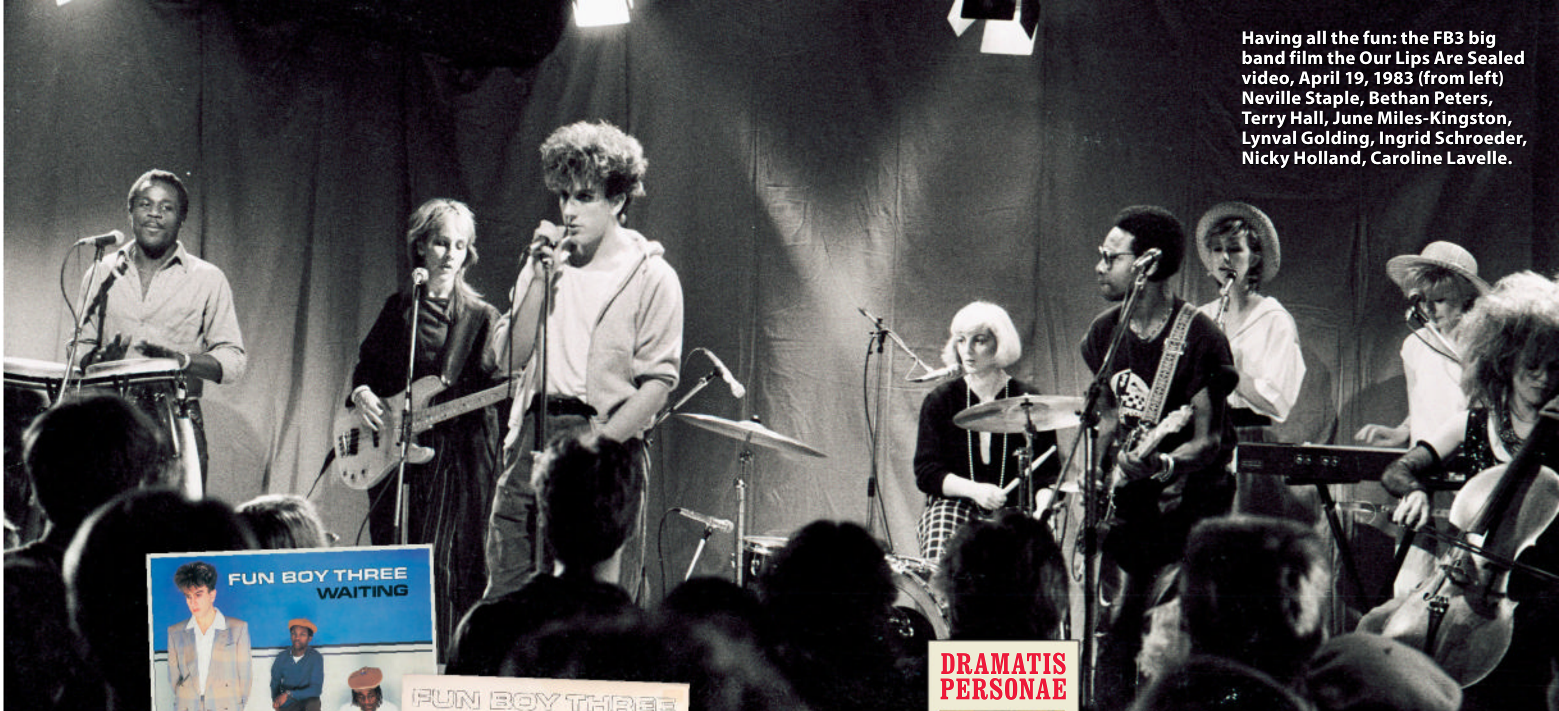
June Miles-Kingston: I never properly met them until I walked into Wessex Studios to play on the album. The first track I did was The More I See (The Less I Believe), then they tried another, and then said, "Come into the control room", and David Byrne was there. Another time, I walked in and David had a brown paper bag on his head with a face painted on the front – he said, "I just want to close myself off today."

NH: Terry told me about this song idea he had called Well Fancy That [describing his sexual abuse by a schoolteacher]. I felt he was trusting me to help him deliver this idea. The thing that's extraordinary is, he doesn't go into a lot of detail in the lyric, but it's very clear what he's saying. I'm sure that was at the root of his mental health problems and set the course for the rest of his life. Thank God he had a creative outlet.

JM-K: We didn't realise how *bad* it was for Terry, you know, because he did have bipolar, and at that time people weren't saying stuff about that. He would get upset about some things and he'd

Steve Rapport/Getty, LJ Van Houten/Shutterstock, Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv

Having all the fun: the FB3 big band film the Our Lips Are Sealed video, April 19, 1983 (from left) Neville Staple, Bethan Peters, Terry Hall, June Miles-Kingston, Lynval Golding, Ingrid Schroeder, Nicky Holland, Caroline Lavelle.



hide it well, because he was very funny.

TH: I think it was songs like Well Fancy That that made me think about writing, and taking it up as a serious thing, rather than always recording or touring.

JM-K: We took it on a big, sell-out British tour [beginning February 1983]. The first gig was at the Regal Theatre in Hitchin. That day, I managed to get run over by a car, not badly, but I had a huge bruise on my leg. I didn't want to tell anybody and once the adrenaline kicked in I was fine. It was the first time we ever played live, and it was televised. At Pinkpop [on May 23, 1983 in the Netherlands] they went absolutely crazy, literally the whole crowd jumping up and down, like miles back.

LG: I would say the best moment [in the FB3] was playing live with the girls, it was just beautiful. We put [debut Specials 45] Gangsters into the set because it reflected on the three of us, paying homage. Also, with The Specials, there was a lot of alcohol, swearing and carrying on. This was the complete opposite, and the dressing room smelled much nicer.

JM-K: We used to say to Terry, "How does your fucking hair take forever?" So much hairspray and back-combing. We used to go shopping for clothes together, or to football sometimes, and he would just be mobbed. But he loved it. He really liked people. He used to get so pissed off on-stage, but that was his protection.

NH: I far preferred the creative part of that journey than the live parts. I found as time went on my relationship with Terry wasn't as close. He became, to me, more erratic. On a couple of occasions it got quite scary. He almost incited a riot in Manchester and pushed my piano over. They burned an American flag during our first American show in New Jersey – Terry had added The Doors' The End to the set and he set fire to the flag at the end.

JM-K: He did go through what I called his Jim Morrison phase, where he wore dark glasses, smoked on-stage and put American flags everywhere. That was just him taking the piss.

NS: America was great. Most of the songs were up-tempo'd and we had a different audience as well. We'd done Our Lips Are Sealed [UK Number 7, May '83], which Terry wrote with Jane [Wiedlin] from The Go-Go's. It's a suitable song for him, yeah – he's not going to explain himself.

Jane Wiedlin: [In 1981 we] ended up touring with Madness and The Specials, and I started a romance with Terry Hall, though he had a girlfriend. He sent me a bunch of poetry and lyrics. Our Lips Are Sealed was about not listening to gossip and what other people say… in Britain they think it's a Fun Boy Three song that we covered, but it's not a cover for either band.

JM-K: I think the penultimate gig was somewhere outside LA. That was awful. The crowd were pissed off because we went on late. Terry locked himself in the toilet backstage. Then he came out and sulked through the whole gig.

NH: Fun Boy Three caused a stir in America but we didn't really break. I could feel it falling apart. We played the Ritz in New York, and David Byrne brought Andy Warhol. I was thinking, Wow, this is amazing, but why is it feeling so horrible? On We're Having All The Fun, the girls' background part was "supposed to be" and I thought, Yep, life is impersonating art. Shortly before the tour ended, I was asked to go and see Terry and he looked at me and said, "I'm sorry, Nicky". I said, It's OK. I didn't see them again after that. Terry was an exceptional human being and I'm really glad that later, we made our peace.

TH: We had record company pressures, promoters, management. America always amplifies your problems. I was quite happy the last gig was in San Francisco [at the Kabuki Theater on July 11, 1983]. I wanted some fresh air but I didn't want to leave the hotel so I'd walked up to the roof. The door had slammed and I remember being stuck up there for about six hours, shouting to people to get me out… that was a sign. I thought, I just can't take this any more, I've got to go home. So I did.

NS: I was in Jamaica on holiday and somebody in England phoned and said, "Oh I didn't know the Fun Boy Three have split up." "Have we?" "Yeah, it's in the paper…" I wasn't mad-mad-mad. I've never held no grudges about anything, never. If somebody wants to do something, you don't hold him. I left the second reunion of The Specials because I didn't like it, you know? It's what Terry wanted to do. The only thing was, how come he never tells me? Did we talk about it later? Nah.

JM-K: Terry was writing music for [Hall's next band] The Colourfield before the tour ended, so I knew what his plans were… the Fun Boy Three was short and sweet, wasn't it? I think it was a stepping stone for Terry, it was him kind of taking some control. He was a gorgeous person. He really was.

LG: We only did two albums with The Specials and with the Fun Boy Three as well. It stopped right at the peak. Then we had an extended holiday.

You know, Terry's with me 24/7 [Hall died on December 18, 2022], emotionally, spiritually, right through. When he'd just died, I had this dream when he came back to me. It was really, really strange – his face was 17 but his body was 63. I said, You look good man, you look good! He looked at me and he just smiled. And he was gone.

TH: Peggy Lee's Is That All There Is? always sticks me with. It's like, things can appear daunting, but really they're not. It's just a part of, y'know, what you have to go through in life. What ends? Everything ends. Ⓜ

The Complete Fun Boy Three box set is out now on Chrysalis. For Neville Staple gigs, see fromthespecials.com. Terry Hall was interviewed in 2014. Jane Wiedlin quote courtesy of Martin Aston.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- Terry Hall (vocals)

- Lynval Golding (vocals, guitar)

- Neville Staple (vocals, percussion)

- June Miles-Kingston (drums, vocals)

- Nicky Holland (keyboards, vocals, arrangements)

- Siobhan Fahey (Bananarama, vocalist)

- Jane Wiedlin (The Go-Go's, guitarist)

Steve Rapport, Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv (4), Getty (2)

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

Over 50 years since their split, and nearly 30 since their last virtual reunion, **THE BEATLES** are back together. In new interviews, **PAUL** and **RINGO** tell the story behind the elegiac Now And Then, rescued from the same batch of Lennon demos as Free As A Bird but, with Ringo unbound, **GILES MARTIN** onboard, and someone or something called MAL, flying far higher. "It was like an impossible dream," they tell **TOM DOYLE**.

Portrait by **JEAN-MARIE PÉRIER**.

NOW
AND
THEN

GROWING UP IN THE DAKOTA building on Manhattan's Upper West Side, Sean Lennon was forever opening up cupboards and discovering his dad's old guitars, amps and effects pedals. As his own ambition to become a musician grew, he would ask his mum if he could put some of it to use.

"She was pretty careful with the guitars," he tells MOJO today, "even though she did let me play a few. What she wasn't as worried about was the pedals, so I got to kind of rummage through that stuff. I got to nick them and mess around with them."

The only items of John Lennon's extant musical paraphernalia that Yoko Ono deemed absolutely off limits to the young Sean were the cassettes and tape reels containing his dad's home recordings. "The tapes were definitely protected," he says. "She wasn't gonna let me, y'know, accidentally record over a demo or something (*laughs*)."

Even though he was only five when his father was killed, Sean Lennon has unusually vivid memories of him. "I've looked into it," he admits. "I think it has to do with experiencing trauma. It sort of makes your brain create long-term memories. I think that's because a lot of ➢

Nothing is real: The Beatles break out during recording sessions for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, February 1967.

Jean-Marie Périer/Photo12

Growing old together: (clockwise from left) McCartney, Harrison and Starr reunited for The Beatles' Anthology project, 1995; Paul, Ringo and George, as seen in the 2023 Now And Then documentary; Jeff Lynne and George Martin, 1995; Sean and Yoko Ono Lennon with Paul McCartney at John Lennon's Rock Hall of Fame induction, 1994.

WHOLE LOTTA ROADIE

The MAL technology that allowed Lennon's voice to be lifted off his Now And Then demo – supposedly an acronym for Machine Assisted Learning – is named at least half in tribute to legendary Beatles roadie/minder/driver/factotum Mal Evans (*below*), known for his ability to lump backline from pillar to post with barely a whimper. As Ringo Starr puts it, "Peter Jackson has the MAL machine that can just lift anything."

© 1995 Paul McCartney/Photographer: Linda McCartney, Getty (3), © Apple Corps Ltd (3)

≺ those memories were really impactful for me."

Many of his recollections involve his father making music: "Just seeing him with the guitar and some kind of 4-track or a 2-track. He was always playing guitar and piano and stuff." John was less concerned, however, with carefully cataloguing his output. That became Yoko's job. "He lived with a creative mess around," Sean says. "My mom is incredibly organised. Y'know, she's an archivist. Thank God, because she really did a good job of keeping everything in its right place."

Historically accused of breaking up The Beatles, Ono would be instrumental in reuniting the group, albeit virtually. On January 19, 1994, following a very public display of détente at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York, where McCartney had given a speech to mark Lennon's induction as a solo artist into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he and Yoko were seen hugging, before the pair announced that the three surviving Beatles were planning to enter the studio the following month to make music together for what was to become the Anthology TV series.

The original plan had been for the trio to record instrumental snippets for the documentary episodes. But, in Manhattan, Ono handed McCartney tapes of four Lennon song sketches: two of which, Free As A Bird and Real Love, were duly completed by the others, with ELO/Wilburys' Jeff Lynne producing, in sessions at Paul McCartney's Hog Hill Mill studio in Sussex in February-March '94 and February '95. Of the two others, Grow Old With Me and Now And Then (also known as I Don't Want To Lose You), only the latter was attempted, and dropped after an afternoon's work.

"Which was a pity," McCartney told this writer in 2006. "It needed a bit of reworking… but it had a beautiful verse and it had John singing it. But George didn't wanna do it. I wanted to do it. And you never know… Yoko and Olivia and Ringo might want to do it in the future."

For McCartney, perhaps an even greater buzz than releasing two new Beatles tracks (Free As A Bird in December 1995, Real Love in March the following year) was the experience of being back 'in' the studio with John. "Hearing him in the headphones, it was like he was in the next room," he marvelled. "That was kind of thrilling. 'Fuck, I'm singing harmony with John.' It was like an impossible dream."

"I THINK PAUL REGRETTED SAYING THEY'D DONE AN AI BEATLES TRACK." GILES MARTIN

THE BEATLES
FREE AS A BIRD
THE BEATLES
REAL LOVE

The continuing story: The Beatles take time out from recording *The White Album*, London, July 28, 1968; (insets) the Free As A Bird (1995) and Real Love (1996) singles.

With Now And Then consigned to limbo, it seemed McCartney would have to hold that feeling close. The Beatles, once again, had fallen silent.

SINCE ITS RELEASE AT THE BEGINNING OF November, Now And Then has been making up for lost time – sending its tendrils everywhere, outraging and beguiling fans as a reverse-engineered Beatles song released by only half the Beatles was bound to do.

And yet, the most startling thing about the revived and restored song is how much it *really does* sound like The Beatles. Where both Free As A Bird and Real Love, under Lynne's direction, veered perhaps too close to ELO while Lennon's ghostly tones drifted eerily from the afterlife, Now And Then is simpler and punchier and expands beautifully upon the dreamy grace of Lennon's original demo. John's voice, meanwhile, is back: front and centre and up-close.

Giles Martin, brought in to co-produce the track with McCartney, has been immersed in the restoration – and subtle updating – of Beatles productions since *Love* in 2006. Despite his absorbed and applied knowledge of Beatle sound and recording techniques, he's taking no more than a modicum of credit. "That's the thing. It *is* The Beatles," he says. "I didn't do anything to make it modern."

Back in the mid '90s, when Jeff Lynne and the surviving Beatles were first tackling the scratchy demos – featuring Lennon on piano and singing into his domestic tape recorder – there wasn't much in the way of technology to pull his voice away from unwanted audio elements. The only available tool was filtering – as utilised on Free As A Bird and Real Love – which reduced the lower frequencies of the piano and made the voice clearer.

But the Now And Then demo was an even more problematic recording, made by Lennon at the Dakota in 1979 on a cassette machine positioned on top of his piano, while a TV burbled in the background. The strength of the song made the obstacles agonising. "It was a very sweet song," reflected Jeff Lynne. "I wish we could have finished it."

But for Ringo, the lo-fi quality of Lennon's sketch was only one of the reasons for shelving Now And Then. For a start, maybe *two* new Beatles songs was enough. "'Let's not get too crazy…'" he remembers thinking. In addition, Lynne's preferences for looped drum parts and overdubbed fills were neither to Starr's taste nor in his style.

"Jeff is very particular and meticulous," explains Ringo today. "He always wants a click track and I keep telling him *I'm* the click. He likes you just to hit the drums or do a short rhythm pattern and then he uses it. He said, 'OK, now do some fills.' But the fill comes when I'm emotionally involved in the track. I think maybe that's what ended the sessions."

Not to forget the heavier emotions stirred up when working in the studio with Lennon's voice. "It really brought to the fore," Starr adds, "to the three of us in the '90s, y'know, that John's gone."

Giles Martin acknowledges the original attempt to record Now And Then may have been triggering for The Beatles, a stark reminder of their friend's murder. "That's a hard thing to deal with," he stresses. "Not only dealing with your mate that's dead, but you're playing on a record where it's like, 'What should it sound like?'"

Talking today, McCartney acknowledges the push and pull of feelings attached to the track.

"It hung around for a while… years," he says, "and every so often I'd kind of go to the cupboard and think, There's a new song in there, y'know. We should do it, we've got to do it. But it would go back in the cupboard. A couple of years ago, I said, 'No, we've really got to do something.'"

THE KEY TO UNLOCKING NOW AND THEN WAS WingNut Films' MAL (or Machine Assisted Learning) demixing software, as used by director Peter Jackson in his three-part 2021 Get Back documentary. Since employed in last year's *Revolver* remixes and the section of McCartney's current ➢

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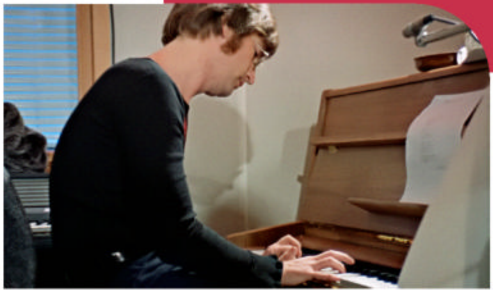
"I like the idea of not letting go of each other": Paul, Ringo and George in 1995; (below, left and right) Paul and John in the Now And Then documentary; (centre) John with Sean and Yoko outside the Dakota building, New York, 1977.

"EVERY SO OFTEN I'D GO TO THE CUPBOARD AND THINK, THERE'S A NEW SONG IN THERE. WE'VE GOT TO DO IT."
PAUL



≺ live show where he duets with Lennon on I've Got A Feeling, it gave the team a miraculously cleaned-up version of Lennon's vocal. In mid-2022, finishing Now And Then once again seemed possible.

Martin was at Abbey Road doing a Dolby Atmos mix of Wings' 1973 album *Red Rose Speedway* when McCartney first told him that he'd been working on Now And Then and had added a new bass line and piano part (echoing Lennon's), while retaining George Harrison's electric and acoustic guitars from the '90s. He asked Martin if he'd be interested in mixing the song. After hearing the work-in-progress track featuring Starr's original mid-'90s beats, Martin told McCartney he felt the drummer's parts should be re-done.

"I said to Paul I didn't think it sounded like Ringo was drumming on it," says the producer. "The style of drums then was very much, 'Boom, clap.' So, we phoned up Ringo."

Starr quickly laid down his new parts at his Roccabella West Studio in Los Angeles. "The way Ringo does things is amazing," Martin adds. "He just listens to a song a couple of times, and literally plays drums along with it."

A rather more old-school approach than the one implied by McCartney in June this year, when he teased, in an interview with BBC Radio 4, that a final Beatles track was on the way. "We were able to take John's voice and get it pure through this AI," he offered, sparking consternation on social media that the team were somehow using artificial intelligence to generate new, Lennon-aping content.

"I think Paul sort of regretted saying they'd done an AI Beatles track," Martin says. "What the software can do is it can extract the voice. Nothing is being added. That's the key thing. The performance on Now And Then is John's performance. It hasn't been AI'ed."

Even so, the process was forward-looking. "We're messing around with state-of-the-art technology," maintains McCartney today, "which is something The Beatles would have been very interested in."

"It seems like a logical extension of their history, as a band, of being innovators," Sean Lennon points out. "It seems very appropriate to me."

"It's strange when you think about it," McCartney muses. "There's him in his little apartment in New York City banging away at his piano doing a little demo, and… our team has restored it so now it's a crystal clear, beautiful vocal. How much would John have liked that?! He would have loved that."

It was this firm belief that kept McCartney going whenever he suffered any doubts. For instance – "Is it a bit inferior? Is it something we shouldn't do? Am I pushing the envelope too far? But every time I thought like that, I thought, Wait a minute, let's say I had a chance to ask John, 'Hey John, would you like us to finish this last song of yours?' I'm telling you, I know the answer would have been… 'Yeah.'"

CUT FROM LENNON'S ORIGINAL DEMO – WHICH you can hear floating around online – was a melodic pre-chorus section ("I don't want to lose you/Oh no no no/Lose you or abuse you…") that those who know it may miss.

"It had a big middle section and I thought it rambled a bit," says McCartney. "I thought to myself, Well, if I was working with John now… I'd say, 'We've got to do something about that middle and maybe even remove it. I think it'll make the song stronger.' So we did. I think he would have been OK with that. Of course I'm never going to know but, y'know, I think mine's the best guess we can have."

"It was up to Paul," Martin says. "Listen, I'm not gonna argue with Paul and John's songwriting. The song's the right length, y'know. It seems to end at the right place and leave you thinking about it."

While he's always careful not to second-guess his father's thoughts, Sean Lennon agrees. "It's not like we've lost that bit," he points out. "It's just that we've gained this Beatles version of it."

More contentious, as least as far as McCartney was concerned, was Giles Martin's idea to add backing vocals culled from other Beatles tracks: namely Here, There And Everywhere, Eleanor Rigby and Because.

"Paul was worried that it'd be gimmicky," Martin admits. "But then he quite liked it. I was just using their 'aahs' and 'oohs' that they sang on other tracks. You could debate whether morally it's the right thing to do, but at least it means that there's more of them on it (*laughs*)."

© 1995 Paul McCartney/Photographer: Linda McCartney, © Apple Corps Ltd (2), Getty

McCartney also fretted about whether or not strings should be added: "But then I thought, Well, The Beatles did lots of string things, y'know, Strawberry Fields… Yesterday, I Am The Walrus… Eleanor Rigby, and no one ever said, 'Boo.'"

Where McCartney might once have asked George Martin to write an arrangement, he naturally turned to Giles, who brought in Ben Foster (Elton John, Nick Cave) to work with him on the score.

Due to scheduling constraints, the orchestral session took place in LA's Capitol Studios, not Abbey Road as tradition might have suggested. During the recording, none of the string players were aware that they were performing on a new Beatles song. "They weren't getting the full track through their cans," Martin explains. "And, of course, they never came into the control room."

While parts of the arrangement were tweaked on the day, and the number of players reduced ("It just didn't sound Beatles enough," says Giles Martin. "It sounded too posh") – the full orchestra was allowed to swell in the new middle section, backing McCartney's slide guitar solo, played on his Rickenbacker lap steel.

"It was really a tribute to George," McCartney says, "so much so that people have sort of said, 'Oh, I love George's solo.'"

The authentic character of the part even briefly fooled Ringo. "I'm sitting there thinking, 'I don't remember George doing that solo,'" he says. "Then Paul said, 'No, it's me.'"

Since Harrison was ambivalent about Now And Then in the '90s, was there any concern within the team that The Quiet One was being posthumously overruled?

"No, because of course this wouldn't happen without [George's widow] Olivia and [son] Dhani's approval," Martin states. "It wasn't that George didn't like the track. It was that they'd done the other two and the quality [of the Now And Then demo] was so bad, I wouldn't be surprised if George wanted to get back to his garden in all honesty."

During the string overdubbing, it became clear to Martin just how determined McCartney was to respectfully represent Harrison on Now And Then. "Paul is very hands-on with arrangements, and he was noticing that we were clashing slightly with George," Martin recalls. "He said, 'I want to hear what George is doing here.'"

ALL OF WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION: IS NOW AND Then *definitely* the last Beatles track we can expect? Might they have another go at that fourth Lennon demo, Grow Old With Me (which even boasts a George Martin string arrangement, recorded in 1998 for *John Lennon Anthology*), using the MAL separation software to polish his voice and with some Harrison guitar work digitally woven in?

"No, I don't think so," Giles Martin says. "I think this is pretty unique because this is what they all worked on and walked away from."

"That's not for me to say," Sean Lennon stresses. "But I will say that I personally am always open-minded to ideas."

Meanwhile, what all involved in the (re)creation of Now And Then agree on is that it had an enormous emotional impact upon them. "Y'know, it's a golden thing to be gifted with at this time," says Sean Lennon. "It's so touching and sad and happy at the same time."

"It's far out," says Ringo. "[John] is so clear now. Because on the original we were working to, I couldn't tell if it was Paul or John singing half the time… but now you know it's John."

Sean Lennon also points out the title of the song seems to echo Lennon's reported final words to McCartney: "Think of me every now and then, old friend." "I don't know if there's any direct connection," he concedes, "but it seems very beautiful anyway."

The one word that both Lennon Jr and McCartney use to describe Now And Then is 'bittersweet'.

"I often blurt out during meetings," says McCartney, "'Oh God, it's really sad that these guys are not here,' and I'll embarrass myself for a few minutes doing that.

"But it's true, y'know," he concludes. "I like the idea of not letting go of each other." Ⓜ

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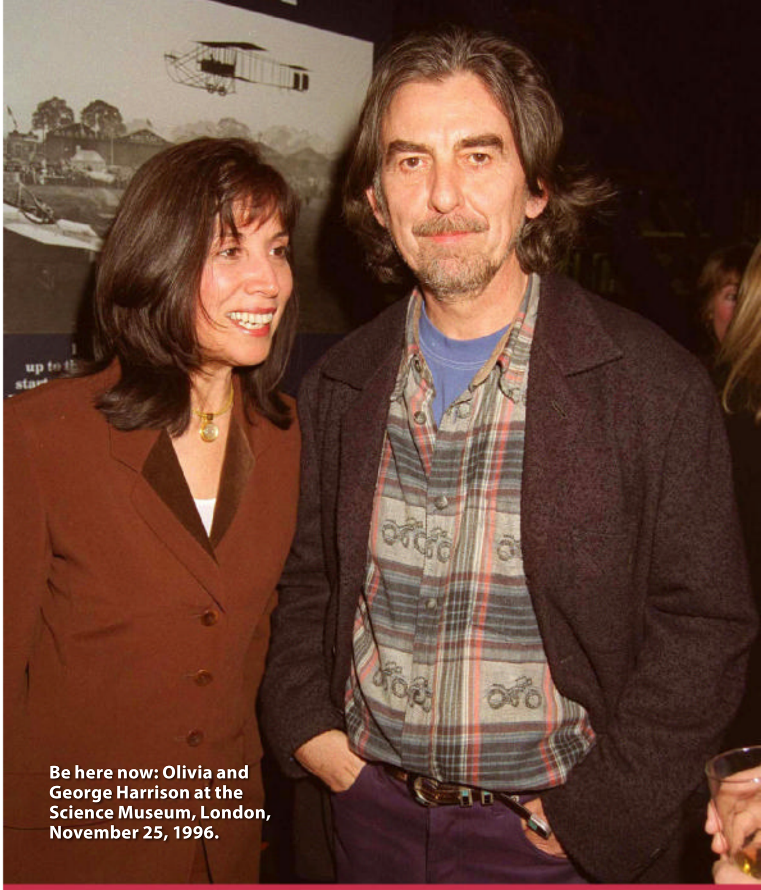


Be here now: Olivia and George Harrison at the Science Museum, London, November 25, 1996.

ANY TIME AT ALL!

How a quirky sculpture bought by George Harrison told his bandmates that he approved of Now And Then. By TOM DOYLE.

"PAUL SAID, 'THE SONG, IT'S CALLED NOW AND THEN.' I'M STANDING THERE ON THE PHONE, LOOKING AT THE CLOCK, AND I WAS SORT OF DUMBFOUNDED."
OLIVIA HARRISON

SOMETIME IN 1997, George and Olivia Harrison were in Providence, Rhode Island, visiting their son Dhani (who was at the time studying industrial design and physics at Brown University). One day, mooching down the city's main drag Thayer Street, they wandered into an arty furniture and jewellery shop named Oop!. Inside, George's eye was drawn to a folk art clock, made from recycled materials, that he immediately decided to buy. "It had a bit of a measuring tape," Olivia relates, "and it had a couple of dominoes and some Scrabble letters – not your white with black but black with white – and it just said 'Now And Then.'"

George took the clock home, and it became the final ornamental piece in a small Russian dacha (or summer hut) he'd had built in the vast grounds of the family's Friar Park home in Henley-on-Thames. "He was attracted to it for some reason," says Olivia. "George always wished he could have made more art. He was always saving bits and pieces."

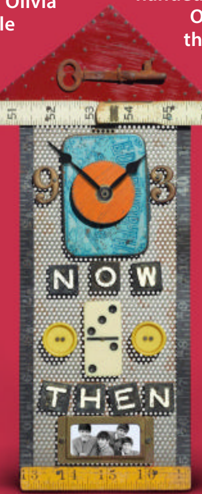
In the years following George's passing in 2001, whenever Olivia Harrison was in the dacha, she'd notice the clock (its battery long dead) and remind herself to at some point bring it up to the main house at Friar Park and get it working again. Then, in the summer of 2022, she finally did.

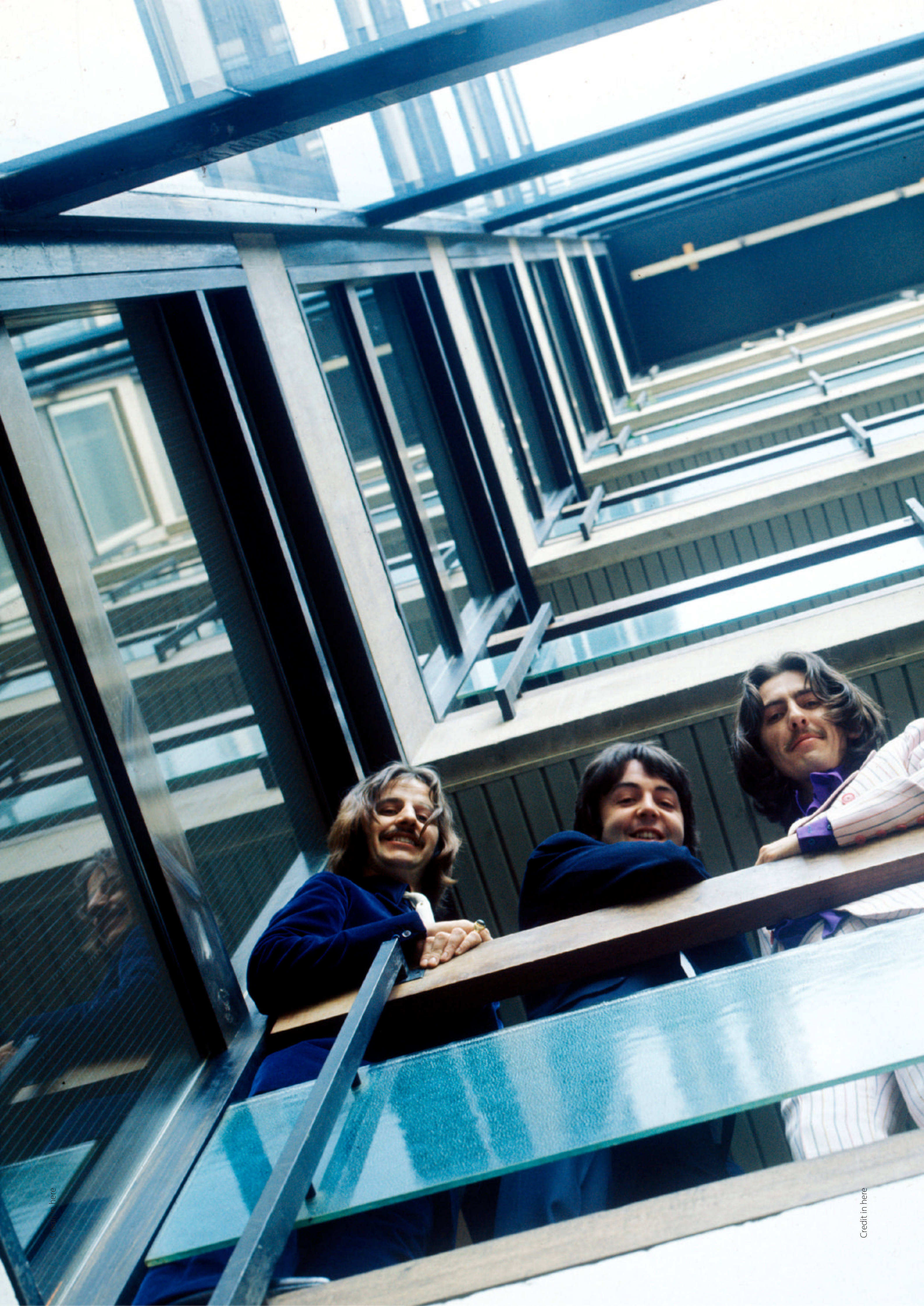
"I took out the old rusty battery, cleaned it up a little bit, stuck a battery in. Lo and behold, it worked. Put it on the mantelpiece. Phone rings. It's Paul, reminding me of this third song that was on the cassette tape with Real Love and Free As A Bird. He said, 'The song, it's called Now And Then.' I'm standing there with the phone… looking at the clock that said, 'Now And Then', and I was sort of dumbfounded."

Following the call, she removed a sepia picture of a Victorian family that had been held in a tiny slot at the bottom of the clock and replaced it with one of The Beatles. She took a photo of it and sent it to Paul. "Paul felt happy about it. So did I. We all did. It just seemed to be handed to us from another time."

Olivia then got in touch with the artist, C Giffin, to request permission for the clock to be used in the back cover art of the Now And Then single. "She was very much a fan of George's and loved his music and… it had some effect on her in her life. She was happy that [artistic appreciation] was full circle and had come back."

Moreover, for Olivia Harrison, it felt like some kind of sign from George. "It just felt like he was saying, 'It's OK,'" she says. "It felt like approval."





Credit in here

Credit in here

Simply The Best?

The Red and Blue albums are **The Beatles**' canonical compilations – gateways, for many, to the world of Fab. Remixed, expanded, and featuring Now And Then, they return, 50 years on, and continue to ask questions. Like who actually compiled them? And how definitively do they represent the band? "The idea was to show their evolution," discovers **Danny Eccleston**, "from the beginning to the end."

Portrait by **Angus McBean**.

The Beatles / 1962-1966
The Beatles / 1967-1970

When we get older: The Beatles in 1969 at EMI's Manchester Square building, London W1, from Angus McBean's shoot for the cover of the shelved Get Back LP. A different frame from the session appears on the front of the Blue (and the back of the Red) album.

Credit here

BY THE END OF 1972 IT HAD already become clear to John Lennon, George Harrison and Ringo Starr that they may have made a mistake hiring Allen Klein as their manager. Paul McCartney, of course, had come to that conclusion long before.

The individual Beatles were flying high in their solo careers, but with their contract due to end, dissatisfaction with Klein and his practices was coming to a head. Former London Records producer Allan Steckler, employed by Klein in 1969 to work with artists including The Rolling Stones and, after their acquisition by Klein, The Beatles, could sympathise.

"Working for Allen Klein had its benefits and its shit days," states the 89-year-old music biz lifer, philosophically, from his New Jersey home. "Some days he could be the greatest person in the world. Most days he was the biggest asshole you ever met."

With the Apple organisation that Klein still headed owing product to EMI and Capitol Records, but nothing in the pipeline, the pugnacious mogul called Steckler into his office. "Can you come up with something?" asked Klein.

In late 1971, with The Rolling Stones recently severed from Klein but their existing catalogue still controlled by the pipe-chewing martinet, Steckler had been charged with the collation and packaging of *Hot Rocks 1964-1971*, quickly to prove an ➢

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< enormous and enduring success (it's since clocked 12x platinum in the US). Unsurprisingly, Steckler suggested doing something similar with The Beatles.

"And The Beatles being The Beatles, one album turned out not to be enough," says Steckler. "So I went to Klein and I told him that and he said, 'Do two albums.' So I did."

Single-handed, or so he tells MOJO, Steckler compiled the tracks and chose the artwork. "I was in England months before," he says, "and I came across the artwork for their proposed Get Back album. And I loved it. And so when I was putting these albums together, I remembered those photographs. And I said they would be perfect for this."

Steckler pauses. He is a good-humoured fellow but when he continues it's with an unmistakable pinch of Bronx pepper.

"I put that package together. And I never got credit for it. Because one of the things Allen Klein frowned upon was letting people take credit for what they'd done."

KLEIN, THE BEATLES, AND MANY subsequent generations of music fans have had much to thank Steckler for. *The Beatles 1962-1966*, and *The Beatles 1967-1970*, released in April 1973 and thereafter known everywhere as the Red and the Blue albums, were instant smashes – Red flying to Number 3 in the UK and US albums charts; Blue peaking at Number 2 and Number 1 respectively – and bedded in as staples of the quartet's catalogue.

The packages offered instant value, featuring among their 54 tracks Beatles singles that had never appeared on albums – at least, not in the UK – but also a compelling narrative. No pop group had travelled so far in such a short time. Angus McBean's rhyming cover photographs – the Red's an outtake from the cover shoot for the UK's *Please Please Me* LP; the Blue's initially intended for the shelved Get Back album – dramatised the transformation perfectly: a journey from innocence to experience and perhaps beyond.

Moreover, three years since the band's demise it was a reminder of their greatness, perhaps a timely one as a new generation of pop-curious people came of age. As Beatles historian Kevin Howlett tells MOJO, "There were already kids of the generation below mine who were like, 'Oh, so Paul McCartney of Wings had this *other* band…?'"

Compilation albums are commercial expediencies. The Red and Blue albums' only official predecessor, *A Collection Of Beatles Oldies*, had been hacked together and bunged out by Parlophone in December 1966, The Beatles having nothing ready for the Christmas market. Dressed in prescient psychedelic garb, its fan-bait the twangsome version of Larry Williams' Bad Boy shouter previously unavailable in the UK (in the US it had been on *Beatles VI*), it feels pretty random even beyond the naff title. The idea that Paperback Writer, Eleanor Rigby and Yellow Submarine – massive songs from earlier in the year – somehow qualified as "Oldies" was either a now-bizarre attempt at irony or sincere testament to the supersonic speed of mid-'60s pop culture.

Today, it seems bizarre that when The Beatles called it a night in 1970 their labels' immediate response was not a career-spanning compilation. But as Kevin Howlett notes, they weren't sure how long the hiatus would last – hopefully, not long at all. So it fell to the bootleggers to make hay. In 1972 a New Jersey company called Audiotape Inc began marketing *Alpha Omega*, a 4-LP set (also available on 8-track cartridge) featuring 60 tracks, including a smattering of recent solo numbers, in mostly alphabetical order, and followed by two subsequent volumes, all brazenly TV and radio-advertised in the US. Although believing themselves to be exploiting a loophole in federal copyright law, Audiotape were hit with a $15 million lawsuit by Klein and it seems they ceased and desisted. Given the timings and the legals, many histories assume *Alpha Omega* had a bearing on the conception of Red and Blue, but Steckler, whose memory seems sharp, demurs: "I don't know what you're talking about."

…*Oldies*, *Alpha Omega* and Red and Blue were all opportunistic responses to gaps in the market at the time they appeared. But it's testament to Steckler's work on the content and packaging that Red and Blue transcended their immediate purpose and continued to do so. Like *Hot Rocks*, Steckler notes, they're not 'Greatest Hits' records pure and simple: "The idea was

HOT ROCKS
THE ROLLING STONES-'64-'71
INCLUDES THEIR BIGGEST HITS:
OLDIES
beatles
AΩ
THE BEATLES
1962-1966
THE BEATLES
1967-1970
DOUBLE PLAY TAPE

Mind games around the Apple table, April 1969: (from left) John Eastman, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Allen Klein, Ringo Starr, Maureen Starkey; (insets, from top) the Allan Steckler-compiled *Hot Rocks*; *A Collection Of Beatles Oldies*; *Alpha Omega*; the Red and the Blue on cassette.

Alpha Photo Press Agency Ltd/Christies Images Ltd

> "The rhyming covers dramatised The Beatles' transformation perfectly: a journey from innocence to experience."

to show The Beatles' evolution, from the beginning to the end." And due to the role they've played in the lives of music fans, perhaps especially those currently in their fifties, and musicians including Noel Gallagher and Dave Grohl who have acknowledged their Red and Blue roots, they have become iconic. For Giles Martin, 54, whose family home did not, surprisingly, vibrate to the sound of Beatles LPs (his dad had presumably had enough of them), their impact was formative.

"I went on a school skiing trip," he recalls. "And my closest mate had the double cassette of the Red and Blue albums. And that was my first introduction to early Beatles. So I knew these records really, really well. I knew the track order back to front."

In terms of their perceived place in the canon, Martin puts it perfectly.

"For our generation they feel like proper Beatles albums," he says. "The *1* album is a compilation, but the Red and Blue albums feel like The Beatles *put them out*."

IN 2023, A REISSUE OF THE RED AND BLUE ALBUMS, featuring powerful new Giles Martin mixes, performs an additional role: as a physical home for Now And Then. But there was nearly another plan.

"There was talk of a new compilation album," Giles Martin recounts – one, he says, that would have taken account of streaming data to deliver The Beatles' current most popular songs. "But I was against mixing a… a playlist, basically," says Martin. "It didn't make any sense to me, because playlists change."

Famously, Alan Partridge's favourite Beatles album was "The Best Of The Beatles", but in reality, as Martin reflects, everyone's Best Of The Beatles is different. The Red and Blue albums are our best approximations of that ideal, tested by time, but they have their biases. Notably: Pop Beatles squeeze out Art Beatles; there are only two tracks from *Revolver* and neither of them are Tomorrow Never Knows or Here, There And Everywhere; the darker, gnarlier Beatles of Helter Skelter, Happiness Is A Warm Gun and I Want You (She's So Heavy) are overlooked. It's a version of The Beatles that beguiles the beginner; you're left to discover the ➢

"We Don't Have To Apologise For Drums"

New mixes propel Red and Blue – especially Red – into the future. "You can feel the air moving in the room," **Giles Martin** tells **Danny Eccleston**.

WITH NO ALTERNATE versions or unreleased revelations (Now And Then aside) Giles Martin's remixes are the main reason to engage with 2023's Red and Blue reissues.

Particularly eye-opening are the versions of The Beatles' earliest recordings on Red: Please Please Me, She Loves You and the bonus disc's pairing of I Saw Her Standing There and Twist And Shout. The option of moving drums and vocals into the centre of a stereo mix, and the ability, through Peter Jackson's MAL technology, to split the sonic constituents of single tracks, free previously constrained instruments to play starring roles. In Martin's words, listening to the new mix of I Saw Her Standing There "you can feel the air moving in the room". It's almost punk rock.

"That's the thing," continues Martin. "They were young guys smashing the shit out of their instruments. And we don't have to be as polite. You know, we're not worried about the needle jumping out of the groove. Times have changed and we don't have to apologise for drums any more."

Another beneficiary is Ticket To Ride. With MAL able to isolate even individual drums, Martin has spread Ringo's kit across the stereo picture. As his iconic, proto-psychedelic beat veers bottom-left into those vertiginous floor-tom flams, the listener almost falls into them too.

"We wouldn't do something like that on every track," says Martin. "It's about what's appropriate. But on Ticket To Ride you *notice* the drums. You should feel like Ringo's going *down there* to hit the floor tom because that's what he's doing."

Other MAL-facilitated coups include Norwegian Wood. Originally, Lennon's guitar and voice were on a single track. "Now we can have the guitar slightly right, and John's voice in the middle which gives you more intimacy, I think," says Martin.

And while you'd assume there's little more to be gleaned from the iconic (ie, overexposed) Yesterday, you'd be wrong. MAL has split the violins, viola and cello so individual instruments can be placed left and right, with McCartney's voice and the plunk of the bass strings of his acoustic guitar in the middle. Somehow, it hits your ear in a whole new way.

Blue offers marginally fewer revelations. Martin's remixes of material from *Sgt. Pepper*, *The White Album*, *Abbey Road* and *Let It Be* are familiar, and while tempted to apply the new possibilities of MAL, he hasn't remixed his remixes ("I mean, when would it *end*?!"). Perhaps most fresh-sounding are his new stereo and Dolby Atmos mixes of *Magical Mystery Tour*'s I Am The Walrus.

"I Am The Walrus, the stereo, is a bitch of a mix," says Martin. "Oh Jesus. I said to my assistant, This is now proper A-level mixing. This is really hard. The original is a technically bad-sounding record that sounds brilliant."

Walrus's mad compression, wild ADT-ing of everything and swirling fragmentary voices are somehow rendered even trippier in Martin's Atmos mix. Immersed inside it, it's more than a little terrifying.

"That's how it should be!" laughs Martin. "There's nothing *nice* about I Am The Walrus…"

> **"I Am The Walrus, the original, is a technically bad-sounding record that sounds brilliant."**
> **Giles Martin**

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Reel love: the Fabs performing I Am The Walrus in Magical Mystery Tour, 1967; (left) chilled out in Austria while filming the Ticket To Ride section of Help!, March 1965.

In the raw: Starr, Lennon, McCartney and Harrison at The Cavern, Liverpool, 1962.

≺ more complex picture on your own.

So why the selected tracks and not others? Noting crossover with 1970's US-only *Hey Jude* album, a rum mix of recent-ish singles plus the anachronistic Can't Buy Me Love and I Should Have Known Better, Kevin Howlett reckons Red and Blue reflect the US releases the compiler(s) would have been more familiar with. But Allan Steckler insists it was far simpler than that: he picked the songs he thought were the best.

"Whenever you do anything creative," he says, "there has to be some personal input that makes you make the choice. Like, Across The Universe is one of my all-time favourites. And that was in there because I wanted it in there."

When The Beatles were asked about the Red and Blue records, at the time and subsequently, they gave various versions of their involvement in it. "George controlled the choice of the material on those albums more than any of us," Lennon told Melody Maker in autumn '73. Later, in his final, 1980 interview with Radio 1 DJ Andy Peebles he mentions that he'd lobbied, unsuccessfully, to have George Martin oversee the mixes. As reported in Rolling Stone, also in 1973, Harrison's opinion of the selection was that "it seems incomplete".

With an extra disc on both 2023 versions, Red and Blue are now far closer to complete, Red having accrued more *Revolver*, three covers and some early George, while Blue's acquisitions include Blackbird (one of Spotify's most-streamed Beatles songs), Glass Onion (its popularity attributed by Martin and others to its use at the end of the Daniel Craig sleuth sequel of that name) and Now And Then. But the new packages are the work of many hands; Steckler was on his own, and remembers no feedback from Klein and only a general approval of the package concept by Lennon and Harrison. "I was the only one in Klein's office who had anything to do with anything artistic," he says. "So I never ran it by anybody there.

"I'm not bragging," he adds, "but I have good taste."

ON MONDAY, APRIL 2, 1973, THE day the Red and Blue albums were released, there was even bigger news in the Beatle Universe. Steckler had already got a whiff of it from Harrison.

"George came into the office and said, 'I wanted you to know before anyone else. We're leaving Allen.' I said, 'Why?' And he said, 'We'll never get together again with Allen managing us.' And that was it. They left. George always had that distant hope."

Steckler was sworn to secrecy, but the news was out soon enough. Lennon and Yoko Ono announced the split at a press conference in New York and explained their reasoning on LWT's current affairs programme Weekend World later that week. "Possibly Paul's suspicions were right," Lennon conceded, before dampening hopes of an imminent re-formation of The Beatles. "Nothing could fit the dream people had of them," he said.

Despite what may or may not have been Harrison's feelings on the matter, there was no pressing need for the Fabs to re-form. Later that same week, McCartney released My Love, which sat at Number 1 in the US singles chart for four weeks, only to be replaced by Harrison's Give Me Love (Give Me Peace On Earth). Later in 1973, Ringo scored US Number 1 singles with Photograph and You're Sixteen. When the Blue album relinquished its position at the top of the US albums chart it was to Wings' *Red Rose Speedway*.

While the solo Beatles ruled the charts, The Beatles as a group were already sliding into a sepia-tinted past. Of the Red and Blue albums' many official successors, none would be as respectful, comprehensive, balanced or, frankly, cool. The most egregious, perhaps, remains 1976's two-disc *Rock 'N' Roll Music*, with its gauche cover illustration and inner-gatefold clutter of archaic nostalgia-signifiers: a jukebox, a Chevy and Marilyn Monroe. "It made us look cheap and we never were cheap," Ringo Starr complained to Rolling Stone. "All that Coca-Cola and cars with big fins was the '50s!" Consulted by Capitol boss Bhaskar Menon, George Martin provided new stereo mixes of many of the tracks (Bad Boy was back, by the way), but they weren't used. It wouldn't be the last Beatles compilation to collate from a pool of less than ideal mixes, edits or masters.

It's not a searing insight, perhaps, to conclude that Beatles comps since 1973 have reflected their times far better than they've served the band. Corporate, compromised, careless – after Red and Blue there was not another that felt lovingly curated until *Anthology 1* changed the game in 1995.

When he too left Allen Klein – after 13 years without a written contract, watching his boss's client roster dwindle – Allan Steckler went over to classical music, later managing the estates of conductor Arturo Toscanini, pianist Vladimir Horowitz and violinist Jascha Heifetz: more titans of 20th century music. His sure touch on Red and Blue is not his only legacy, but it's a significant one. In fact there's really only one thing that bugs MOJO about his original selection: whether you love the track or not, George Harrison's saturnine Old Brown Shoe seems an odd choice…

"I was looking at the album just today," Steckler tells MOJO with a smile. "And the same thing came to me. I don't have a *fucking idea* why I put that in there."

Mixed Blessings

Beatles compilations: the good, the bad and the ugly. Selected by **Danny Eccleston**.

Love Songs

(UK + US, 1977)

Delivered what it said on the tin (maybe She's Leaving Home was a stretch). Curiously, Yesterday and three other songs flipped the left and right channels of the familiar stereo versions.

Rarities

(UK 1978, US 1980)

The UK got mostly B-sides and EP tracks (here's Bad Boy again), the US mostly UK edits and mixes. Both featured Lennon's ethereal Across The Universe from 1969's World Wildlife Fund charity comp, *No-One's Gonna Change Our World*.

The Beatles Ballads

(UK, 1980)

Repeated some of *Love Songs'* flipped stereo mixes. Say what you will about its John Byrne sleeve art, but – created in 1968 as a possible cover for *The White Album* – it was at least *echt* Beatles.

Reel Music

(UK + US, 1982)

Fourteen tunes from the Beatle films, coinciding with a theatrical re-release of A Hard Day's Night. Awful illustrated cover and "Souvenir Programme" insert. The Limited Edition 'gold' vinyl edition is the one to have.

20 Greatest Hits

(UK + US, 1982)

Proving Mark Twain's adage that there's no such thing as a new idea, this compiled all The Beatles Number 1 singles, UK Number 1s in the UK, US Number 1s in the States.

Past Masters Vols 1 + 2

(UK + US, 1988)

Unimpeachable wheeze: all The Beatles singles and B-sides on CD (Yes It Is! I'm Down!), plus the WWF Across The Universe and, like a bad penny, Bad Boy *again*. Notoriously crap sound until remastered and redeemed in 2009.

[Apologies to readers outside the US and UK, who had their own, sometimes even quirkier product.]

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MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

WES MONTGOMERY
WYNTON KELLY
ROCKSTAR
SOUL JAZZ RECORDS
SPACE FUNK
Vagabonds of the Western World
Harp
Albion

> “Lou Reed was a box of tricks: sensitive and vicious, controlling, and empathetic.”
>
> **JON SAVAGE SEES ALL SIDES OF LOU REED. BOOKS P110.**

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Avalon calling

After 10 years of silence, former Midlake frontman Tim Smith finally finishes his first adventure. By **Victoria Segal**. Illustration by **Borja**.

Harp

★★★★

Albion

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Harp
Albion

LYING CLOSE to Cowbeech, Foul Mile and Wartling in deepest East Sussex, Herstmonceux is not so much village as real-life Marillion album cover. It is known for its windmill, its castle, and the green telescope domes that once housed the Royal Observatory; a medieval festival every August makes it perfect for anyone who wants quality time in doublet and hose. It's possible that Tim Smith might fit that bill: a song called Herstmonceux closes Harp's *Albion*, the first record from the former Midlake singer and his wife and creative collaborator Kathi Zung.

The kind of Anglophile drawn to the wet greys and browns of the English countryside – not to mention the ruined-abbey atmospheres of The Cure's *Faith* – Smith named the track after a memorable day trip to the village while recording with Brighton-based guitarist Max Kinghorn-Mills. It's a rare moment of concrete reality amid *Albion*'s uncanny, half-lit spaces. Given the title, the band name, the cloak-wearing artwork and promo shots of Smith and Zung with chessboard and tankard, you might assume it's a kind of Arthurian concept album, prog rock LARPing from a man who, after all, once made a record called *The Trials Of Van Occupanther*. It's an impression intensified by the video for the half-timbered Fleetwood Mac of I Am The Seed, where Smith drifts through a wooden church in a quilted jerkin and bonnet, his breath visible around him.

> **"Harp's Tim Smith is the kind of Anglophile drawn to the wet greys and browns of the English countryside."**

BACK STORY: BEYOND THE 'LAKE

- While Tim Smith has been quiet for 10 years, he has not been entirely silent, contributing to Lost Horizon's 2017 album *Ojalá* (above) and 2021's *In Quiet Moments* (below). His former colleagues in Midlake, meanwhile, released their fifth album *For The Sake Of Bethel Woods*, while former Midlake bassist Paul Alexander plays on *Albion* track Silver Wings.

Yet there are no jester's tears here, just Smith's. Behind the costuming and the occasionally archaic language ("Let thy winds/And the tempest beat"), *Albion*'s 'concept' turns out to be a simple one: sometimes it's hard to be human. It's even harder when love leaves your life; harder still if your muse follows suit. "When the vow had finally broken, I set out alone," sings Smith on Silver Wings, a drizzle-damp Crosby, Stills & Nash that hints at the turmoil that triggered Harp's mission.

Smith left Midlake in 2012, amid recording sessions for the intended follow-up to the Texan band's third album, 2010's *The Courage Of Others*. He would later say that his perfectionist creative process was not compatible with the life of a working band – a claim supported by the fact *Albion* has taken 10 years to materialise. Smith's first marriage ended shortly afterwards; it was only when he met Zung – a puppet-maker who has worked with Guillermo Del Toro – that he found a foil for his meticulous work (and one who could programme a drum machine.)

Albion, then, represents a double grail quest – both the search for love and the struggle for artistic fulfilment. While there are literal cloaks involved, there's also a heavy metaphorical veil: Smith's songs are wrapped in images of fountains and mountains, birds of prey and cathedrals, regrowth and renewal. He has form for constructing these uncanny, time-slipping worlds. Midlake's 2006 breakthrough *The Trials Of Van Occupanther* existed in a strange storybook space, Smith wondering what life would be like "been born in 1891", remembering long-gone communities and ocean migrations that may or may not have existed.

Harp reaches further back, but it still feels like a way of translating difficult emotions into a more manageable, once-removed form, hooding them in fantasy to avoid a direct confrontation with the self. "Well, I went mad/I was mad," Smith sings on Throne Of Amber, a song that suggests a terrible suspension of reality, Radiohead's Street Spirit (Fade Out) chased through a maze by The Cure. "Bring me an axe/Bring me a spade/Bring me a winding sheet." I Am The Seed, meanwhile, is not about joyful blooming, but a thwarted germination, a barren silence. "You write about the thing you've been doing for years, feeling like you're failing at almost every day," Smith tells MOJO.

That desolation is inescapable on *Albion*, its ageless chill not achieved with lutes and crumhorns but drum machines and shivering guitars. For three years of the past decade, Smith says, he was listening to *Faith* non-stop, and there's a funereal shudder to I Am The Seed or The Pleasant Grey. He also developed an interest in "Clan Of Xymox, those more cold wave kind of bands like [French '80s dark-wavers] Asylum Party".

Albion isn't really about living in the '80s any more than it is about the sixth century, yet whatever Smith puts through his filters comes out as part of his frosted sound-world. The lovely sighing Daughters Of Albion and Country Cathedral Drive's Go-Betweens hush both nod to William Blake's myth-forging poem Visions Of The Daughters Of Albion. Chrystals sounds like someone left Rufus Wainwright out in the rain; there are persistent Midlake-era traces of Fleetwood Mac, a little Robert Wyatt, and, on the fluting instrumental Moon, the synthesized beauty of Beverly Glenn-Copeland.

Yet *Albion* does find redemption, reward for such a long, bleak mission. "Wherever thou art is where I am," sings Smith on Shining Spires, while the Cocteau Twins tumble of A Fountain details the hazards he has experienced – bandits, drunk guards, cursed thoughts – before declaring "a new love is born". The closing Herstmonceux, opening with a welcome swirl of other voices recorded by Smith at evensong in a Scottish cathedral, repeats the line "I am a seed", but this time there's the chance of green shoots: "Quietly the sorrow flees from me/Bright as day the soul no longer grieves."

It's true *Albion* carries itself with a care that could be construed as cold – Smith says he is working on songs more infused with a "'70s warmth". Yet its gloomy roving and monkish precision make its spring thaw all the more affecting. "I felt it begin/With a hundred new thoughts/And a vision again," sings Smith on Silver Wings. "Was it something or not?" *Albion* is something, no doubt about that, a quest so beautifully completed that once again, after all those years in thrall to its demands, Smith is free to roam wherever he wants.

TIM SPEAKS! SMITH ON HARD WORK, THE CURE'S *FAITH* ALBUM AND SWORD-AND-SORCERY MOVIES.

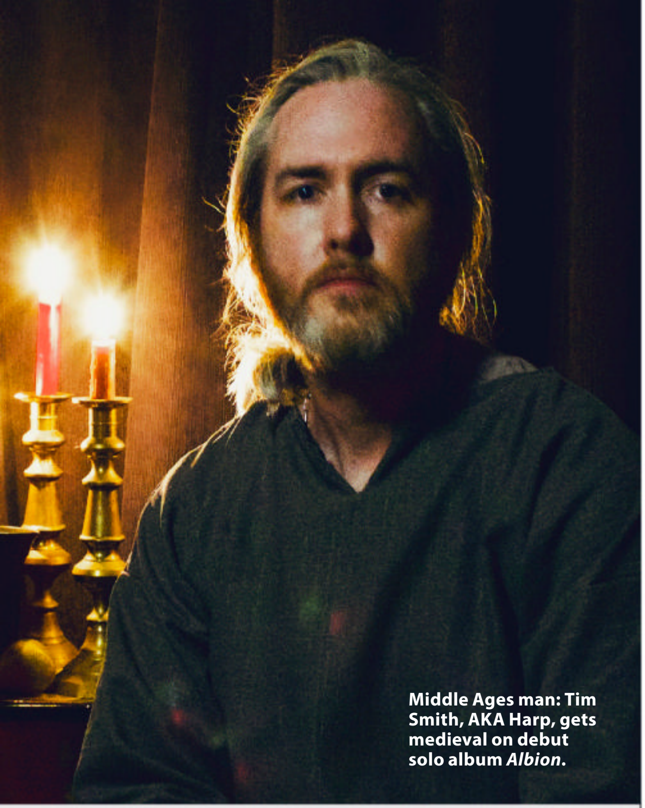
T.SMITH BOOKS
FANTASY

THE CHRONICLES OF TIM SMITH

With the loneliest years behind me the world is right

ALBION

by HARP



Middle Ages man: Tim Smith, AKA Harp, gets medieval on debut solo album *Albion*.

"I don't know how The Cure did it."

Tim Smith speaks to Victoria Segal.

It's easy to say *Albion* has been 10 years in the making, but what does that look like day to day?

"I should clarify that 90 per cent of the album was recorded in the last five years. That makes things sound a little better (*laughs*) but, yeah, day to day… I'd love to say that I went on vacation and travelled Europe for three years or something. But no, I was hard at work pretty much as soon as I left Midlake. So there's really no excuse. The day was like, get up and do music for, you know, three or four hours before lunch, have lunch. You're going to do another three or four hours after lunch, and then maybe even in the evenings. It wasn't fun. I don't want to go through that again. It's just very difficult for me. I tried it different ways as well – like, Well, this isn't working, so let me just try two hours a day. Or, I'll just do it whenever I feel like it. But nothing seemed to work. It's just good, old-fashioned… hours spent in there."

Was there a moment when you finally felt that the record was coming together?

"It was always slow, always difficult, from the very first three months. Like, Oh no, this is going to take me three years. Then, I can't believe this, it might take me five years to make this thing. Five years comes, and I realised it might be five more. I always figured I would somehow get in some kind of rhythm, but it never snowballed into that. It was always a struggle and most days, you come away with nothing. And the songwriting part is the easier aspect. The most difficult thing is the producing. Maybe a few things will sound good, but then there's always something throwing it off. And unless you're gifted with the ability to hear what that problem is, it could take you a long time to discover what's wrong. You know, it could just be a kick drum."

Did working with Kathi Zung [half of Harp, and Smith's wife] ease the process?

"Yeah, it really steered some things. Every day, you're just faced with a hundred sonic possibilities and to go through that with someone is just a great thing to have that I didn't have for the first five years. She's got great ears, she's very knowledgeable about music. I trust her opinion. Songs like Daughters Of Albion – I was thinking it wouldn't even make the album. But she convinced me that it should."

Where does your love of the medieval come from?

"I think it just comes from watching movies, really. The Beastmaster, you know that movie? It's all fantasy stuff – Dragonslayer, Excalibur, The Dark Crystal. As a kid, that's what got me into the medieval and fantasy kind of thing."

What's so special to you about The Cure's *Faith*?

"I just love all the songs on it. That grey cover. Whatever that is in my head that I think of when I think of cold grey days in England, it had that. Just the way it's recorded – I don't know how they did that. To me, it's a perfect-sounding album."

OXY MORE WORKS
JARRE

Jean-Michel Jarre

★★★

Oxymoreworks

SONY MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

A gamut of electronic stars help the French synth maven rework 2022's *Oxymore*.

Last year's *Oxymore* was an unexpected throw of the dice. A densely atmospheric homage to late composer and *musique concrète* founder Pierre Henry, Jarre's former tutor at Groupe de Recherches Musicales, it built on his original stems and samples. While Brian Eno and Berlin-based disruptor NSDOS employ synth harmonics and mutilated techno to buy into its more experimental otherness, shadow-playing collaborations with Russian minimalist Nina Kraviz and US darkhouse producer Deathpact feel more anonymous, lacking Jarre's distinctive touch. Fans of his more maximalist fantasias will find plenty of succour in the arpeggiated freefall of French 79 duet Epica and a gleaming, trance-induced hook-up with natural ally Armin van Buuren, the only real hands-in-air moment. Fancily rendered in binaural sound, file this dark corollary next to 1984's *Zoolook*.

Andy Cowan

Foghat

★★★★

Sonic Mojo

FOGHAT. CD/DL/LP

Veteran blues-boogie combo's seventeenth LP.

Scott Holt guested on Foghat's previous album, 2016's *Under The Influence*, and with the retirement of Charlie Huhn, has stepped up as lead guitarist and singer. He played with Buddy Guy from the age of 20 and loves the blues as it's "warm, human and uncorrupted by technology". So, he's a perfect fit. Formed in 1971, Foghat decamped from London to the US where they achieved success with their cranked-up hard boogie featuring highly rated slide guitarist Rod Price. What was new then has become timeless, and although drummer Roger Earl is the only original member, Foghat still tap back to those roots. On Drivin' On, Holt reels off some spectacular slide, they cover Chuck Berry's Promised Land, take a drive into ZZ Top territory on She's A Little Bit Of Everything, and the country flavoured I Wish I'd Been There is a paean to Hank Williams.

Mike Barnes

Matt Berry

★★★

Simplicity

KPM. CD/DL/LP

Berry's first collaboration with the music library label.

Berry is a big fan of vintage library music and *Simplicity* features 11 tracks, all under four minutes, which evoke the atmosphere of the KPM Greensleeves LPs from the late '60s and early '70s, particularly the music of Alan Hawkshaw and Johnny Pearson. Groovy drums, exotic percussion, Carol Kaye-style bass lines, and Berry's primary-coloured keyboards are all on the menu. The pieces have useful titles like Widescreen Features and Rising Bass, although with its sunny disposition, Good Sport would actually make excellent title music for a TV holiday programme. Transition's simple tune goes through tricky time shifts and includes drumming so extravagantly phased it would be too outré for even the hippest early-'70s TV show, and other individual touches like loopy guitar lines and Shaft-style wah wah elevate this set to Berry's love letter to KPM, rather than a pastiche.

Mike Barnes

Woodleigh Research Facility

★★★★

Phonox Nights

FACILITY. DL/LP

The late Andrew Weatherall's final album. Comes on quadruple vinyl.

Before his death in 2020, British dance music's refusenik genius had reunited creatively with Nina Walsh, his mid-'90s flame and collaborator: among their later work together were two outings as Woodleigh Research Facility and this belatedly-released third, from which, Gates To The South was completed days before he died. Walsh attributes *Phonox Nights'* often elegiac mood to the grim surroundings of her studio near Streatham in south London: after travelling there, AW "couldn't face more than 102 bpm". As such, the nine tracks revisit that collision of futuristic gleam and post-industrial murk started on 1993's *Sabresonic*, where the indie-dance progenitor inspirationally left-turned into his own sinister twist on Detroit techno. Walsh had latterly coaxed him to get more hands-on at computer and keyboard, where he'd overlay wonderful top-line melodies. "We're getting quite good at this now, aren't we?" he'd mutter. They really were.

Andrew Perry

Daniel Bachman

★★★★

When The Roses Come Again

THREE LOBED. CD/DL/LP

Questing Virginian ditches guitar and makes his own string-driven things.

At this point on a run of extraordinary records, Daniel Bachman feels like a musician rebuilding American traditions from the ground up – in some cases, literally. For this 15th solo LP, he made his own instruments – Appalachian mouth bows, radically deconstructed banjos – while working as a carpenter's assistant in Shenandoah National Park, near Washington DC. Studded with drones, digitally collaged, the remarkable results sound, very roughly, like a folk group featuring Harry Partch, La Monte Young and Christian Fennesz. There's a field-recorded sense of place – albeit not as pronounced as on *Almanac Behind*, Bachman's 2022 threnody on climate crisis – and of history, too. As Bachman uses Carter Family lyrics for track titles, and creates beautiful, uncanny twangs on tracks like Someone Straying, Long Delaying, he also summons family ghosts, specifically his 19th century string band ancestors The Hostetler Blind Family Band. As is now customary for Bachman: progressive conceptual art, underpinned with profound personal resonances.

John Mulvey

Strings attached: Daniel Bachman literally rebuilds American traditions.

Lunar tunes: Peter Gabriel delivers something substantive and deeply considered.

The whole of the moon

His tenth solo album, reportedly the digest of some 150 possible songs accrued over 20 years. By James McNair.

Peter Gabriel

★★★★

i/o

REAL WORLD. CD/DL/LP

PARTLY BASING their "world music inventing" comic creation Brian Pern on Peter Gabriel, Rhys Thomas and Simon Day had Brian make a Christmas LP in support of bi-polar polar bears. "I'm flattered by it," Gabriel told MOJO's Mark Blake when he asked about the parody. Game for a laugh, he seemed to recognise that his daft doppelgänger's thirst for innovative and worthy projects rang true.

Though no orphaned bonobos jam with Gabriel on his first LP of new material since 2002's *Up*, *i/o* – read in/out – is the typically techie, multi-media meshing work of one of rock's true Renaissance men. Its themes, meanwhile, are as humane and forward-looking as ever, hence Panopticom (sic) advocates surveillance of suspect politicians by the people, and the title track's pantheistic worldview highlights our connected-ness and mutual dependency.

In a very Brian Pern-like move, each full moon of 2023 has seen an *i/o* track released as a single, while the work's two discs present Mark 'Spike' Stent's painterly Bright-Side mix, and Tchad Blake's more sculpted Dark-Side mix. Even before you peruse the LP's vast supporting cast – The Soweto Gospel Choir, Brian Eno and long-trusted hands Tony Levin (bass), David Rhodes (guitar) and Manu Katché (drums) all figure here – there's a hell of a lot to process.

You can spoof Gabriel, but you can't knock his voice. None of its sumptuous richness has eroded, and there's a moving, empathetic ache to orchestrated ballad Playing For Time, which explores personal mortality and our ailing blue planet. So Much, too, is an extremely eloquent, piano-led meditation on life's autumn creeping to winter, "each decade more camouflage for the wild-eyed child within".

Even if the tender, richly textured Love Can Heal, this record's Mercy Street, seems in-hock to mid-'80s Gabriel, *i/o*'s songs hang together far better than one might expect given its long, sonic trend-spanning gestation. This Is Home – percussive 'world' groove, soulful, declamatory vocal – feels perfectly, classically Peter Gabriel, while And Still – written for and about his late mother Edith – is decidedly prog; a modulating, elegiacally English thing with flute and Elgar-like cello. "I place my head against your skin/As I did as a boy", sings Gabriel, dropping his guard like never before.

What did we get for our 20-year wait? Something substantive, something deeply considered. Like sometime collaborator Kate Bush, Gabriel will incubate as long as is necessary. With so much to digest, that slow drip-drip of successive singles now makes perfect sense, but heard in a single sitting, *i/o* is something else again. Listening to it while considering the visual artworks specially commissioned for each track, you will be rewarded.

Nadav Kander

White hot: James Petralli (left) and Raze Regal bring a sonic sweetness to their first collaboration.

Soulmates

James Petralli's Texan post-punk crew make a dream team-up. By Andrew Perry.

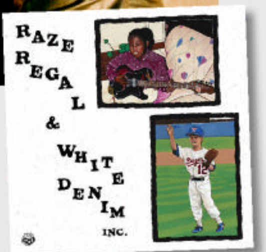
Raze Regal & White Denim Inc.

★★★★

Raze Regal & White Denim Inc.

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

WHEN WHITE Denim first erupted out of a 27-foot Spartan trailer parked by a forest near Austin, Texas, there was a seductive purity about this trio hatching their own twist on Southern rock in isolation. Across the 15 years since 2008's inaugural *Workout Holiday*, singer-guitarist James Petralli necessarily brooked external influence.



The early line-up's final outing, 2013's *Corsicana Lemonade*, was self-designated a "barbecue record", sunny and hassle-free, and as a wider pool of players gathered around Petralli and staunch bassist Steve Terebecki, brief liaisons ensued, like Cass McCombs co-penning Thank You for 2016's *Stiff*. While there was no shortage of propulsive energy on 2019's *Side Effects*, latterday albums have largely dialled down the polyrhythmic chafing in favour of a mellow soulfulness, ornamented with jazzy chord changes and occasional cosmic wanderings – including this first full-length collaborative venture.

Raze Regal entered White Denim's orbit on a West Coast tour in 2019, where the guitarist featured in the supporting Once & Future Band, the jazz/prog-leaning garage-rockers from Oakland. The following year, the simultaneous ending of both band and Regal's romantic arrangement led to the Californian relocating to Austin.

Petralli, who'd been diversifying into production at his Radio Milk facility, initially worked in that capacity on a bunch of his new friend's song ideas, but gradually his role expanded to include co-writer and lead vocals, with back-up from Terebecki, and, amongst others, Mk. 2 Denim regulars Jeff Olson (drums), Mike St Clair and Michael Hunter (both keyboards).

On the surface, *Raze Regal & White Denim Inc.* definitely feels like a White Denim record, with their leader's honeyed yet aching voice out front, and his combo's unflashy versatility captured with the warm, fuzzy Texan feel that fans relish kicking back and basking in. Overall, you're vaguely reminded of 1973's balmy *3 + 3* by The Isley Brothers (think: Summer Breeze), all contributors quietly straining at the leash to let the virtuosity run free.

There's also, however, a pervasive zing in the way the two guitarists fire to and fro at 2:14 on Blood, or double-tracking each other Thin Lizzy-style at Ugly Man Suit's finale.

For his part, Regal brings an unforeseen lyrical pungency, reflecting his chaotic circumstances. Opener Ashley Goudeau reveals his rather desperate attachment to the eponymous KVUE TV News anchor: "she's the only one I see", he pines, via Petralli's yearning tenor – quite literally so, as his arrival in Austin coincided with the first pandemic lockdown. Elsewhere, Don't Laff picks through the wreckage of his love life to a Style Council soul-pop skip, while dreamy Dislocation muses on washing up in a strange town.

Such are the bitter tangs which perfectly offset the record's all-encompassing sonic sweetness. From top to bottom, what a joy it is.

Catatonic Suns

★★★★

Catatonic Suns

AGITATED. CD/DL/LP

Allentown, PA trio channel the Screaming Trees on acid-grunge debut.

Following the Nirvana-esque moves of labelmates Laurel Canyon, this Pennsylvania trio tap into the grunge revival's Sabbathy roots and psychedelic aspirations. Their debut often feels drunk on its own considerable volume, but the mesmeric acid-rock melodies of Be As One ride a rhythm section that could move any mountain, while the sitar-driven heft of Deadzone possesses a similar might to *Dust*-era Screaming Trees. There's more going on here than just the spirit of '92, however – guitarist/vocalist Patrick Shields' swaggering snarl owes more than a little to Liam Gallagher, while the group's penchant for chronic FX pedal abuse conjures shoegaze on steroids. As ever with this music, however, it's the riffs that really matter, and the slow build of eight-minute closer No Stranger, all doomy bass and spiralling lead guitar, pushes their heaviness to somewhere thrillingly cosmic.

Stevie Chick

Light Beams

★★★★

Wild Life

DISCHORD. DL/LP

DC punks expand ranks and rhythms for third album.

Given the things singer/bandleader Justin Moyer has experienced – he's a Washington Post reporter who covered the January 6 insurrection; his daughter's school suffered a sniper attack – he'd be forgiven for making a record that's nothing but screaming distortion and literal screaming. That Light Beams' melody lines are so clean and backing vocals by new members Leah Gage and Erin McCarley are so perfectly Go-Go's-esque, instead lends a sense of normality. But Sam Lavine's avalanching polyrhythms, augmented by Gage and McCarley, ensure nothing feels "normal". Light Beams' dizzying post-punk reflects a world perpetually awry; their lyrics are a response to it. On Never 2 Late 4 Bass (It's Real) it's unclear if the "getting stronger" chant is a warning about enemies or a promise that right will prevail. But its testimony that "You need a song to see you through" is dead on.

Chris Nelson

Dhani Harrison

★★★★

Innerstanding

H.O.T./BMG. CD/DL/LP

Second solo album from Son Of George.

DHANI HARRISON

Further exploring the murky electronic rock he developed on 2017's *In Parallel* (after years spent quietly film and TV scoring and three albums with his band Thenewno2), Dhani Harrison here finds himself in stylistic step with Steven Wilson, particularly the latter's recent *The Harmony Codex*. *Innerstanding* is similarly lengthy at 55 minutes and founded on sturdy industrial beats and eerie synth pads, Harrison digitally mangling his voice (La Sirena) or offering up hooky chants in Damn That Frequency and New Religion (featuring skronky guitar from Graham Coxon). Elsewhere he even successfully veers into punk-funk on The Dancing Tree. Apart from that George-like title and Dhani's dreamy-headed vocal in Ghost Garden, there's little here for Beatleheads (which is probably his intent). Ultimately, *Innerstanding* finds Harrison marking out his own territory, sustaining a brooding musical atmosphere and filling it with sterling melodies.

Tom Doyle

Maple Glider

★★★

I Get Into Trouble

PARTISAN. CD/DL/LP

Australian Tori Zietsch's tuneful triumph over ecclesiastical evil.

Singer-songwriterly exorcisms of romantic pain are hardly in short supply, but this second MG album introduces deeper currents of body shame and inadequacy arising from Zietsch's repressive Christian upbringing in Brisbane. "I've been in the church making sure no one's looking up my skirt – I do not feel safe here," she confides on the deceptively breezy Dinah, echoing Sinéad O'Connor's portrayal of religious institutions as threatening to young women, while Don't Kiss Me deals with the unhappy consequences ("sometimes my own body doesn't feel like my body"). Now resident in buzzy Melbourne, Zietsch's music upholds the sparse, haunted tone set by Lana Del Rey, the minimalism so acute that each chord change often lasts for just one stroke of the strings or ivories. The colour here is infused via crystalline singing, elegant melodic phrasing and those lyrics of unflinching confessional acuity.

Andrew Perry

PRINCE FATTY
THE GORGON
DUB

Prince Fatty

★★★★

Prince Fatty Meets The Gorgon In Dub

VP/GREENSLEEVES. CD/DL/LP

Dub versions of classics by Horace Andy, Cornel Campbell, Leroy Smart, Jackie Edwards etc.

Prince Fatty is Mike Pelanconi, the UK engineer and producer who has worked with Shniece, Hollie Cook and Horseman. The Gorgon is Bunny 'Striker' Lee, the late, great reggae pioneer. Earlier this year the former was given 10 cuts from the latter's archive, all propelled by The Aggrovators' mighty rhythms, and in his Lewisham studio, based on King Tubby's original analogue set up (full details of all the equipment and processes used are given in the sleevenotes), he then stamped them in dub. Beginning with the hypnotic Jah Jah Dub The Conqueror, a re-edit of Linval Thompson's classic Jah Jah A The Conqueror with Tommy McCook's jazzy arrangement, and ending with the killer Adubajoni, which derives from Jackie Mittoo and Vin Gordon's Real Rock instrumental, it's sonically innovative, crisp sounding and full of flying cymbals and deep bass.

Lois Wilson

Dolly Parton

★★★

Rockstar

BIG MACHINE. CD/DL/LP

Think Whisky A Go Go, not Grand Ole Opry. Dolly goes rock on LP number 49.

Forget turning it up to 11 – Dolly Parton goes to 30 on *Rockstar*. Thirty songs, that is. Her legend/bonhomie is such that sundry fellow icons from Stevie Nicks to Steven Tyler to Joan Jett thrill to duet with her on this (mostly) rock covers set, but asked to reconvene for Parton's glossy take on Stairway To Heaven, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page declined. Our redoubtable hostess hams it up on the playful, 'wayward rock daughter' title track, while the other Parton original here, World On Fire, campaigns for truth amid climate change emergency. From there, it's a lengthy conveyor belt of starry, inoffensive duets, but Parton, Pink and Brandi Carlile's feisty take on (I Can't Get No) Satisfaction impresses. Even if there are moments when *Rockstar* seems under-amped, you have to admire her chutzpah.

James McNair

Various

★★★

Moping In Style – A Tribute To Adam Green

CAPITANE. CD/DL/LP

Moldy Peach receives token of esteem from his peers.

As a member of New York's oddball scenesters The Moldy Peaches and later solo artist, Adam Green has spent over 20 years and 11 albums as a pungent acquired taste, a singer-songwriter who might have sprouted from the grout of Lee Hazlewood's bathroom or fermented at the back of Scott Walker's fridge. It's a taste happily acquired by his contemporaries (or thereabouts), though, with *Moping In Style* drawing out the depth (if not necessarily the breadth) of his writing. Fellow travellers The Libertines, Regina Spektor and Jeffrey Lewis all make perfect Bohemian sense on their covers; The Lemonheads match well with Losing On A Tuesday's "purposeful disasters", grunge kapok leaking out its seams, while Lou Barlow's Never Lift A Finger locates the song's emotional sharp end. Rooted in a distinctive strain of New York hedonism and millennial tension, Green's songs still travel surprisingly well.

Victoria Segal

Chartreuse

★★★★

Morning Ritual

COMMUNION MUSIC. CD/DL

Kidderminster quartet's clattering debut.

Things are slowly slipping into place for Chartreuse, the band named after a French herbal liqueur. There was Satellites, the collaboration with former Maccabee Orlando Weeks; a tour with Palace and now a shed-cum-recording-studio in the garden of brothers Mike and Rory Wagstaff's house. Drummer Rory is as upfront as Radiohead's Phil Selway was on 15 Step, stentorian-voiced Mike is a most assertive crooner, so on the title track they're as glacial as Tindersticks, but their folk roots peep through on the closing Sorcerer's Eyes. It's quite a shock when Agitated turns out to be piano-led, spartan chamber pop and guitarist Harriet Wilson pops up to sing the relatively gentle sounding, but lyrically vicious Whippet. They avoid disappearing down a percussive cul-de-sac, so the clattering drums are leavened by twinkling melodies, self-lacerating lyrics and the sense that something is stirring here.

John Aizlewood

Great American

Empty Country

★★★★

Empty Country II

TOUGH LOVE. CD/DL/LP

Grand opus from ex-Cymbals Eat Guitars leader essays a nation in decline.

The indie-rock ordinaire of his previous vehicle, Cymbals Eat Guitars, hardly suggested that Joseph D'Agostino had within him so ambitious and occasionally unhinged an epic as this. Taking as his loose concept the terminal unravelling of America, D'Agostino eschews preaching for character studies, his characters lost in the shuffle, beaten by addiction, pursued by predators. Set to emotive alt-rock and twisted Americana, this is a work of high drama; David, a heartfelt tribute to the late David Berman, plays out like a sardonic Springsteen epic. And if *Empty Country II* ultimately doesn't cohere like D'Agostino intends, when his kaleidoscopic narrative delivers – the jarring imagery of Bootsie, its titular runaway "convulsing outside Port Authority"; sprawling closer Cool S's guitar-heroics – the results are impassioned, haunting and brilliant. The sound of an artist with a nation's darkness running around his head, desperate to let it out.

Stevie Chick

Thomas Walsh

★★★★

The Rest Is History

CURATION. CD/DL/LP

Cult Irish songwriter, formerly known as Pugwash, continues to dazzle on debut solo effort.

THOMAS WALSH
The Rest is History

Like some paradisical, inexplicably less-visited shore, Thomas Walsh's output still feels like a precious secret – and this despite props from Brian Wilson, XTC's Andy Partridge and Walsh's hero, Jeff Lynne. Descriptors of the 'tunesmith' sort don't do justice to the hyper-melodic majesty of *The Rest Is History*, since Man Lies Down Again sounds like a lost Harry Nilsson/Gerry Rafferty co-write, and Another Lesson In Life is the sort of song Liam Gallagher should cover. Co-conspirators in on Walsh's secret this time include Def Leppard singer/fellow Dublin inhabitant Joe Elliott, and long-term foil Neil Hannon from The Divine Comedy, who brings twangy, Mike Flowers Pops guitar to A Good Day For Me. There's also an exquisite, 'desert island discs' lilt to grass-skirted ballad Love In A Circumstance.

James McNair

John J. Presley

★★★★

Chaos & Calypso

GOD UNKNOWN. CD/DL/LP

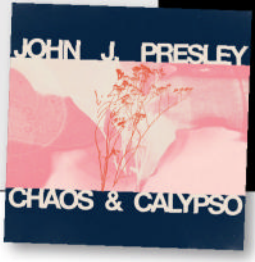
Elemental Brighton blues man brings that weird chill.

THOUGH HIS voice rumbles like God rearranging the furniture, John J. Presley is likely closer to the man downstairs, his deliciously amoral tales regularly playing the sinnerman as the hero. Presley's fire'n'brimstone second album contains precious little calypso, and chaos isn't really his thing, either – from their simmering slow-build to their eventual explosions into cathartic jazz-skronk (Sea Of Deserters) or distorted noise (The Sequel), every element of Presley's brooding blues songs is expertly placed for precise effect. His uncanny balance of black humour and bleak drama, meanwhile, places him in the lineage of Nick Cave and Mark Lanegan, but while Presley spins tales of a similar gravity to those dark princes, he's never simply aping them. His gift for economy, meanwhile, is impressive: opener Silhouettes establishes the album's noirish menace with minimal couplets like, "I come alone/I leave alone".

Stevie Chick

John J. Presley: channelling noirish menace.

Steve Gullick



Life is a cabaret: Madness venture into a mordant thematic zone for one of their best LPs yet.

Only when I laugh

For LP 13, the Nutty gents enter the prog music hall of existential despair. By **Ian Harrison.**

Madness

★★★★

Theatre Of The Absurd Presents C'est La Vie

BMG. CD/DL/LP/MC

IN THE wake of Robin Williams' 2014 suicide, the well-worn fable of a desperate man being advised to cheer himself up by seeing the great clown Pagliacci made the internet rounds. "But Doctor," answers the suffering patient: "I am Pagliacci."

As followers of warped British humourists including Max Wall, Spike Milligan and Tommy Cooper, it's a tragicomic scenario Madness could sympathise with. They've been a mirth-bringing, all-ages part of the pop furniture since 1979, but they've also long acknowledged the less cuddly connotations of their name, with depression, awry family dynamics, alcohol abuse and other traumas present in their lorryload of hits. It is in this mordant thematic zone that the floridly titled, slowburning *Theatre Of The Absurd Presents C'est La Vie* alights.

More akin to 2009's concept-opus *The Liberty Of Norton Folgate* than 2016's looser *Can't Touch Us Now*, it opens with a Martin Freeman-narrated intro which namechecks Samuel Beckett before the string-adorned title track brings visions of an audience trapped forever in a darkened theatre watching, sings a haggard Suggs, "the last and only performance of the cruellest cabaret." Baggy Trousers this is not. Freeman duly sets up a three-acts-and-an-epilogue suite filled with dread, angst, peril and regret, to brassy, thump-and-lope ska and soul which broadly recalls the nervous breakdown skanking of 1981's hit Grey Day.

The LP's live debut in October at Camden's Koko made explicit the various fractures that run through it – political mistrust, Covid, selling off the country, fast-eroding trust in institutions among them – with easily-read screen projections (these also included a big brick wall, proof if it were needed that several members were once concept LP-absorbing prog-rock fans). On record alone, there's plenty to intrigue. A Madness song called In My Street, you'd suspect, might cross over into poignant yet warming Our House territory. Instead, it ghoulishly depicts a populace that's drugged, drunk, surrounded by trash and looking for an exit sign, with a final psychic breakthrough/collapse ("then you're free!") before looking haplessly for God to sort it all out on Judgement Day. Things are clearly not as they once were. Baby Burglar's ghost dance ska is a grimly powerful descendant of Lee Thompson's 1979 borstal memoir Land Of Hope & Glory, with a haunted ex-con reflecting on teenage murderers. Bizarrely, alienated groover If I Go Mad suddenly quotes 1986 B-side Call Me, co-written by estranged nutty avatar Cathal Smyth: it's enough to make you wonder if the humanoid robot in the pose of Rodin's The Thinker that sits beside the current six-man formation on the cover is somehow meant to be him too.

At Koko, some in the crowd seemed to want One Step Beyond and My Girl instead. Don't be fooled. The necessary and sustaining art-yin to their live knees-ups' yang, with *Theatre Of The Absurd...* Madness have made an album that is among their absolute best.

MADNESS
C'EST LA VIE

Adeline Hotel

★★★★

Hot Fruit

RUINATION RECORD CO. CD/DL/LP

Think Jim O'Rourke's acoustic orchestrations, tucked in for autumn.

With its seven tracks totalling just 27 minutes, *Hot Fruit* – the seventh LP from New York guitarist and Ruination Record Co co-founder Dan Knishkowy – might first scan as too slight. But slip beneath the surface, and it's impossible not to notice the big feelings buttressing these subtle little wonders. Backed by the great trio Scree, pianist Winston Cook-Wilson, and a coterie of string and woodwinds players, Knishkowy seems to emerge from some post-pandemic or bitter winter redoubt to have frank conversations with old friends. They pass the lissom melody of Little Chili around like a topic of banter at Sunday brunch, stuffed and relaxing by song's end; Old Baldy suggests rubbing sleep from your eyes to stare out at the dawn, content to exist at all. There is a dazzling ECM architecture beneath these sentimental Windham Hill beauties, together revealing repeated treats despite the LP's brevity.

Grayson Haver Currin

Johnny Dowd

★★★★

Is Heaven Real? How Would I Know

BRIGHT SPARK. DL/LP

Dowd returns to his roots, the right side of Memphis.

You expect the unexpected with a Dowd album – since his debut *Wrong Side Of Memphis* (1997) we've had American Gothic, weird funk, warped dance, beat poetry and more. Jon Langford's sleeve art suggests something Chaucerian this time, but it's stranger still – a pretty much straight-ahead blues LP. Recorded at Delta-Sonic Sounds, Memphis – where Dowd grew up – and produced by Will Sexton, who brought in most of the musicians. Rick Steff's slow blues piano starts things off, setting the pace for many songs. Very fine songs they are too. Opener Another Mule, a murderous sing-along, brings Tom Waits to mind, with its piano, toolbox percussion and donkey-back tempo; while tender Ice Pick, about young love, brings out Dowd's inner Otis Redding. Also, Dowd's trademark guy-girl duets are present and correct (Fire And Dust; LSD), featuring Sexton's wife Amy LaVere.

Sylvie Simmons

Luther Dickinson

★★★

Magic Music For Family Folk

ANTONE'S/NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

North Mississippi Allstars' guitarist pays tribute.

Luther Dickinson has made an LP of covers of his favourite childhood songs. These comprise old blues, rock'n'roll and soul numbers originally by The Meters, Staple Singers, John Lee Hooker, Mississippi John Hurt et al which his father, the producer Jim Dickinson, first played him. Begun in 2017, it was mainly recorded in his Nashville living room (then mixed at Sam Phillips Recording in Memphis) with family – his brother Cody plus his mother and daughters – and friends including Yola, Allison Russell and Sharisse Norman. The renditions are unfussy, sentimental – acoustic guitars, Wurlitzer organ, simple percussion with sat-round-the-campfire style voices. His admirable motivation was simply to pass it on to the next generation; 'it' being great music and the camaraderie it brings. Pleasurable and heartfelt, you have to hope it achieves its intention.

Lois Wilson

Neil Young

★★★★

Before And After

REPRISE. BR/CD/DL/LP

New solo album; a remembrance of things past.

BEFORE
+
AFTER

Given Young's Coastal tour last summer, where he played – alone at the piano, pump organ, acoustic and electric guitar – songs he felt like playing from his past 55 years, it figures his latest release would be a live solo LP. What's interesting is it wasn't recorded on tour, though it does feature several songs from its setlists, like Comes A Time, Mr Soul and I'm The Ocean. The 13 songs are newly recorded – alone at the piano, pump organ and guitar, just acoustic this time – and segued into one 48-minute piece of music. Where the stage show had the intimacy of Young's between-songs chats, the intimacy here comes from the sensation that you're listening in on his thoughts as one song drifts, like memories do, from one time to another. Closing with Don't Forget Love, the LP's dedicated to Neil's late manager Elliot Roberts.

Sylvie Simmons

Perou

Iron And Wine

★★★

Who Can See Forever

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

Live soundtrack album from film saluting American folk stalwart.

After more than two decades as Iron And Wine – a run that has included six solo LPs and collaborations with Calexico and Jesca Hoop – Sam Beam (a former film professor) is receiving the star treatment with Josh Sliffe's documentary Who Can See Forever. Recorded at Haw River Ballroom in Saxapahaw, North Carolina, this album hints at Sliffe's original intention to make a live concert film, capturing 19 songs from across Beam's career. It's a fine close-up, so sharp you can almost catch the dust glinting in the lights as Beam showcases his willowy, supple songs. Grace For Saints And Ramblers, from 2013's *Ghost On Ghost*, is delivered with nonchalant Lou Reed rhythm; 2017's About A Bruise displays a freewheeling agility, while The Trapeze Swinger plugs right into Beam's storytelling mode. Even without the visuals, it's possible to detect the bigger Iron And Wine picture here.

Victoria Segal

Candice Ivory

★★★

When The Levee Breaks: The Music Of Memphis Minnie

LITTLE VILLAGE. CD/DL

An absorbing tribute to the greatest female figure in country blues.

Candice Ivory, a Memphian herself, tackles songs like You Can't Rule Me, World Of Trouble or the bleakly violent Hole In The Wall with the tough mindedness and in-your-face defiance that made Memphis Minnie so singular in her time. Part of her power lay in her intricate guitar duetting with husband Kansas Joe McCoy (who actually sang and possibly wrote the title song and Pile Driving Blues; these are not wholly Minnie's), but this is not what producer Charlie Hunter has chosen to replicate. Whereas the original recordings had a driving energy, these are often laid-back, the pedal steel's Hawaiian dreaminess an effect somewhat at odds with Minnie's spirit. Elsewhere the spare lines of Minnie's later recordings without McCoy are translated into rather static patterns of guitar and African-like percussion. But it's a rewarding and sometimes ingenious response to Minnie's work.

Tony Russell

Johnny Flynn & Robert Macfarlane

★★★★

The Moon Also Rises

TRANSGRESSIVE. CD/DL/LP

Voice of The Detectorists' matter of life and death.

Cast as David Bowie in 2020's Stardust, actor Johnny Flynn recently portrayed Richard Burton on the London stage, but for his latest collaborative record with nature writer Robert Macfarlane, he plays a slightly sexy combo of Brideshead Revisited's Sebastian Flyte and The Wicker Man's Lord Summerisle. Conceived while the friends were out walking, *The Moon Also Rises* is a Kibbo Kift-friendly cycle of hand-whittled songs of death and rebirth. Windswept opener Uncanny Valley essays a sort of Chris Rea noir, but thankfully *The Moon Also Rises* gets a good deal more bonkers; Anglo-Pogues on Burial Blessing and a more butch take on the Hidden Cameras' gay church folk music on Coins For The Eyes. The genius addition of a lusty female chorus ups the Rose'n'Likky-era Incredible String Band ante for The Sun Also Rises and Year-Long Winter. Faintly ridiculous, but transcendent nonetheless.

Jim Wirth

Johnny Flynn: hand-whittled songs of death and rebirth.

Steve Gullick, Autumn de Wilde

Gonzalez Smith

★★★★

Roll Up A Song

BOBO INTEGRAL. CD/DL/LP

Drive-By Trucker by day, solo artist by night.

Mostly known as the third guitarist and keyboard player in Drive-By Truckers, Jay Gonzalez is also a fine songwriter. With Patterson Hood and Mike Cooley already fulfilling that role in the Truckers, however, the New York native only flexes his skills on occasional solo albums. For this third record he's teamed with lyricist and Adult Swim comedy writer Pete Smith. Smith's lyrics (mostly) about girlfriends – ones that got away, ones he can't believe didn't, and ones that he wishes had – nuzzle into Gonzalez's tunes like a spooning couple, whether it's the Ben Folds-like The Lexington Line, electric piano ballads Forgetting You and What Comes Next, a nod to The Cars' new wave pop on She's My Girl or the wry tribute song Lindsey Buckingham. *Roll Up A Song* is way too playful, clever and heartfelt to be considered as a mere sideman's side-project.

Andy Fyfe

Alex Hitchcock

★★★★

Dream Band: Live In London

WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

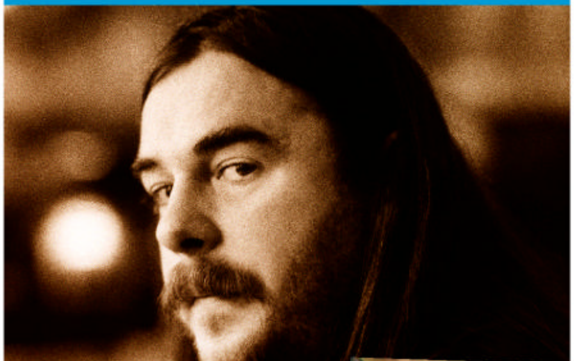
Tenor sax virtuoso shows compositional range across three live sets.

Recorded over consecutive nights at London's Vortex, this ambitious triple LP finds Alex Hitchcock working with three discrete bands of his choosing, running with the concept premiered on 2021's *Dream Band*. An endeavour predicated on trust and compositional wiles (the material is all new), Hitchcock consistently summons spacious, playful outings that allow his guests full expression. That could be the sumptuous wooziness of his tenor and Mark Kavuma's trumpet intertwining amid Jamie Murray's crashing piano (disc one's Abaqua), Lewis Wright's vibes lighting up an elegant melodic arc (disc two's Momentum) or his powerful chemistry with Alexandra Ridout (disc three's Brockten). Tumbling with ideas, impulsive improvisations and swinging, left-field energy, Hitchcock's storytelling intent is the unifying thread. It's a series that could run and run.

Andy Cowan

FOLK

BY JIM WIRTH



John Francis Flynn

★★★★

Look Over The Wall, See The Sky

RIVER LEA. CD/DL/LP

Lankum circle trad maverick mounts the barricades.

"My approach is just being very respectful to the essence of the actual tune and then you can frame it however you want," John Francis Flynn told MOJO, explaining the thinking behind his second album's astringent brew of extreme vocal understatement and ravishing ghost noise. The Lankum associate's complex take on the encroaching soullessness of the Irish capital, *Look Over The Wall, See The Sky* finds electronic static attacking The Zoological Gardens, while Within A Mile Of Dublin showcases Flynn's lyrical flute playing before descending into a pounding racket. If there is harsh reality, though, Flynn offers transcendent loveliness as well: The Seasons takes on a luminous Bill Callahan pallor, while his closing version of Ewan MacColl's Dirty Old Town approximates Richard Thompson's Dimming Of The Day rewired by Årvo Part. Quietly, unassumingly, Flynn deftly unhitches these songs from the shackles of their time and allows them to speak anew. Like the chalice of green liquid on the cover, intoxicating stuff.

ALSO RELEASED

Smoke Fairies

★★★★

Carried In Sound

YEAR SEVEN. CD/DL/LP

The White Stripes via the twins from The Shining, Chichester pals Katherine Blamire and Jessica Davies were a roots-y mid-2000s sensation, but recent homemade releases have a Stevie Nicks goth-folk tone with bonus Judy Collins high notes. Trad nuts may harrumph at Seek It With Me's cosmic Unthanks gloom, but Mellow Candle crazies will want a hit of what these Fairies are smoking.

Jack Rutter

★★★★

This Is Something Constant

BANDCAMP. CD/DL

Last sighted on Topic's 2022 *Sea Song Sessions* – alongside Jon Boden, Emily Portman and long-term associate Seth Lakeman – West Yorks troubadour Jack Rutter returns to aggro-*Penguin Eggs* basics on his third solo disc. Path-less-trodden song choices – Earl Scarslington's Seven Daughters, Ninety Nine & Ninety, James Atley & Sir Fenix – plus John Noakes'n'Shep bounciness serve him well.

The Rosie Hood Band

★★★

A Seed Of Gold

LITTLE RED RECORDINGS. CD/DL

Rosie Hood has assembled a classy band since 2017's *The Beautiful And The Actual*, but remains the main attraction, the Wiltshire-raised singer cracking mountains here with an elemental The Swallow and a courtly Turtle Dove. The LP skews a little sugary but Tyger Fierce – sung from the perspective of a caged beast in 18th century Malmesbury – echoes Carole Pegg's primal witchiness. Hear her roar.

TRÚ

★★★★

Eternity Near

BANDCAMP. CD/DL/LP

A trio from Northern Ireland, TRÚ's drivetime-friendly take on folk hints at the reviewer's dream of a Steeleye Span-Steely Dan hybrid. Awash with foot-thick harmonies and '80s John Martyn production values, their second LP delights in unexpected twists; jazz flute on Is Fada Liom Uaim Í, grunge shades on Two Sisters and Wild Mountain Thyme done Marrakesh Express style. Strange but… *JW*

Healing hands: Shirley Hurt, AKA Sophia Ruby Katz, lovingly makes sweet and sharp songs.

Magic pie

Toronto-based singer-songwriter seeks enlightenment through prayer, travel and pudding.
By Victoria Segal.

Shirley Hurt

★★★★

Shirley Hurt

MELODIC. CD/DL/LP

"WHEN YOU met me/I was really going through it," sings Sophia Ruby Katz on Charioteer, a meditation on love, reincarnation and horses that forms one of her debut album's more curious extended musical metaphors. The mystery of what it is exactly that the Canadian singer-songwriter is going through lies under these songs, their turmoil rendered in oblique strokes and opaque arrangements, any painful glare filtered through her smoked-glass, Bridget St John voice. It makes sense that she should have cloaked herself in such an enigmatic, ambiguous name as Shirley Hurt – part variety bill headliner, part wounded Everywoman.

These songs emerged from a similarly obscure set of impulses. Trying to relieve a period of creative inactivity, Katz tried to shake her mind loose by travelling across North America in a camper van for six months with guitarist Harrison Forman. It was only when an on-the-road acquaintance suggested Katz pray daily (deity unspecified) to remove the block, she says, that she found music started to rattle free, songs taking cloudy form with a band that included Forman, Joseph Shabason on saxophone and flute, and Nick Dourado on piano.

Yet while there is a devotional quality to the songs on *Shirley Hurt*, the love here is secular, volatile, far from beatific. Problem Child, dancing to an intrusively awkward beat, mixes adoration with unease – "I am your accomplice /Robbery in progress". Charioteer turns love into a sword-and-sandals epic, all spinning wheels and self-immolation; there are images of shackles, cages, leashes. Joseph Bhattacharya's drums jump-start the unpredictably swinging Pendulum, while All Looks The Same To Me is reminiscent of Polly Harvey's work with John Parish, a masculine call-and-response cutting through the ghost-folk guitar.

As with Cate Le Bon and Aldous Harding – whose oddly bolted syntax and sense of stilted theatricality she sometimes shares – there is an inscrutability to Katz's songwriting, a sense of distance being kept. Occasionally, it goes too far, and her signal drops, but on Let Me Down Easy, moving with the resigned topple of somebody falling into bed, or the marmalade-skies wobble of Smile, she finds the right balance between clarity and intrigue.

In the tender video for Problem Child, Katz is instructed how to make an apple pie by her grandmother, a recording of a beloved and reliable recipe being passed on down the generations. While Katz might now have a steady grasp of flour and butter, the gentle idiosyncrasy of the music she has created for the first Shirley Hurt record makes it hard to imagine her sticking to any measurements more than once. These are sweet, sharp, lovingly made songs, but next time you lift the lid, you suspect, there could be something very different underneath.

Iraina Mancini
Undo the Blue

Iraina Mancini

★★★

Undo The Blue

NEEDLE MYTHOLOGY. CD/DL/LP

London singer/songwriter's promising debut album.

A skilled multi-tasker who juggles her music career with DJ-ing, radio broadcasting and modelling, this 34-year-old London-born singer began her recording career leading a rock duo called Mancini, whose 2007 single Up Country was helmed by Primal Scream and Garbage associate Jagz Kooner. Now a solo artist, Mancini reunites with Kooner for her debut album, an energetic collection of retro-tinted, attitude-heavy powerpop flecked with noir undertones. The punchy opener Deep End, with its grainy production values, and the giddy single Cannonball, defined by swirling psych-pop guitars, reveal Mancini's penchant for rousing, anthemic choruses. More impressive, though, are the album's slower, more sensitive songs; like the bittersweet ballad Undo The Blue, where a horn section lifts the chorus, and the dreamy, mid-tempo Sugar High, where Mancini's aching voice is framed by softly swooning strings.

Charles Waring

Pete Molinari

★★★★

Wondrous Afternoon

BLIND FAITH RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Soulful sixth album from Kent troubadour.

WONDROUS AFTERNOON
PETE MOLINARI

Pete Molinari has recorded lo-fi folk blues in Billy Childish's Chatham kitchen, gospel country with The Jordanaires in Nashville and R&B pop with Linda Perry in LA. Here he's in Rome, where with producer Luca Sapio he's steeped in classic soul and recording live to tape. Positive vibes abound, with the majority of the tracks sounding like they were written in the Brill Building and assembled on the Motor City factory line. Molinari doesn't possess an authentic soul voice, it's quite reedy, but he brings more than enough enthusiasm and conviction to compensate, borne out on the thrilling Love Is Just A Word and Only When I Love. The Rampaging Sons Of The Widow James is different again, though, paying homage to Morricone and the spaghetti western with mariachi horns and a tale of an anti-hero.

Lois Wilson

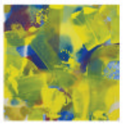
Philip Selway & Elysian Collective & Chris Vatalaro

★★★

Live At Evolution Studios

BELLA UNION. CD/DL/LP

Radiohead drummer restrings third solo album.



The musicians on this recording were originally gathered together by Philip Selway for the launch event of *Strange Dance*, the solo album he released in February. The combination – his songs, string quartet Elysian Collective, percussionist Chris Vatalaro – pleased Selway so much, however, that he decided he needed to document the collaboration, recording this session at Oxford's Evolution Studios. Listening to the stately The Heart Of It All, it's not hard to understand the Radiohead drummer's enthusiasm for the project. The soft colours of Picking Up Pieces – The Go-Betweens dancing in the dark – are brightened and refocused here, while Check For Signs Of Life comes with a new up-close-and-personal clarity. There's also a version of soundtrack piece People Of The Sea and fragile unreleased track Songs For Us. It's not a dramatic reworking, but it's another few strings to Selway's accomplished bow.

Victoria Segal

Ancient Infinity Orchestra

★★★★

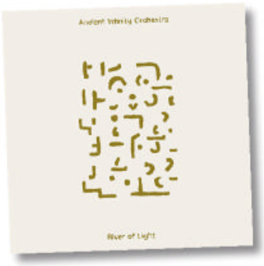
River Of Light

GONDWANA. CD/DL/LP

Elevated spiritual jazz from Ozzy Moysey's Leeds ensemble.

Recorded over three days with a choir of friends mucking in on Alice Coltrane-like vocal chants, Ancient Infinity Orchestra's debut is a new take on an old idea. Flush with interlocking rhythms, heavy chords, sinuous drones, subtle overtones and Eastern-tinged melodies, the slightly ramshackle likes of Greeting and Rejoicing resemble rebooted spirituals, intricately patterned with harps, strings, oboes and flutes. The title track's rippling reverie, the morphing, wordlessly sung Equanimity and hymnal Niyama, with Mathew Cliffe's warming sax, are more blissful wash than wild cacophony, full of transcendental leanings and contemplative calm. With nods to Albert Ayler and Pharoah Sanders (explicit on coda Pharoah Sings), it's a mesmerising, transportive album that balances melody with rhythmic play.

Andy Cowan



Vor-stellen

★★★★

Parallelograms

FLYING NUN. DL/LP

New Zealanders' double vinyl doubles down on their love of kosmische.

The Subliminals only made one album, 2000's *United State*, Flying Nun's definitive statement of trance-inducing post-rock. Finally, three of the band – guitarist/vocalist Stephen Reay, drummer Brendan Moran, and bassist Jared Johansen have reunited as Vor-stellen (German for "to imagine"), expanding the blueprint into four mini-marathons totalling 55 minutes of improvisation; shifting sands of synths, drones and loops. Pollen Carrier and Voyager slowly build and release tension in the spacious manner of Modern Nature; Grønland (an unplanned but serendipitous reference to Neu!'s Groenland label, says Reay) and Folding Of The Time are faster and more motorik. Vocals are low-key and intermittent, the lyrics opaque: the 16-minute Voyager comprises just one line ("Oh I see, these things through, three things through"). On *Parallelograms*, music is the key, its steady eye fixed on the horizon as the world glides by.

Martin Aston

Matmos

★★★★

Return To Archive

SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS. CD/DL/LP

Fabled folk archive gets raided by cut-and-paste experimentalists.

"Music or noise?" This sample on *Return To Archive*, out of hundreds woven into Matmos's 14th album, aptly summarises over 25 years of determined, dedicated musical experimentation by Baltimore's sonic voyagers. Together, Drew Daniel and M.C. Schmidt operate on the margins of electronica (2016's *Ultimate Care II* rattled along to the thumping rhythms of a washing machine). Here, they were granted free rein to use Folkways Records' 75 years of non-musical recordings, held at the Smithsonian Institution. Daniel's exhaustive sleevenote details the breadth of collected sounds used – Tortoise Mating Call anyone? On Mud-Dauber Wasp, the titular hymenoptera's beating wings morph into a frantic bass line and warped beats to create something akin to Dutch gabber. In mirthful fashion, percussion on the galloping Lend Me Your Ears is part-sourced from Sounds Of The Bowels – A Normal Hungry Man Smoking A Cigarette Before Dinner. Unlikely to soundtrack your next dinner party, but it's hard not to marvel at Matmos's cut-and-paste mastery.

Stephen Worthy

Matmos: digging into the Smithsonian Institution's crates.

Marion Benoit, Farrah Skeiky

Micko & The Mellotronics

★★★

Le Vice Anglais

LANDLINE. CD/DL

Second album from Jack Fairy and friends.

Best known for playing the elusive Jack Fairy in Velvet Goldmine and as The Bowling Green, electro pirates signed to Trent Reznor's Nothing label, Micko Westmoreland has history. His second Mellotronics outing features such unlikely collaborators as Specials bassist Horace Panter, comedian Kevin Eldon and P.J. Harvey sideman Terry Edwards. It's giddy but conventional though, evoking Gang Of Four's choppy restlessness, most notably on the jagged The Transformation; The Wonder Stuff's Englishness on the sirens-drenched Alpha Male and the frenetic disco-punk of Edwards's first band, The Higsons. Holloway Road ("Let's all meet up down the Holloway Road," Westmoreland suggests, rather hopefully) is a skew-whiff London anthem and Kid From Nowhere is all urban paranoia and social awkwardness. Westmoreland's shift away from dance maven (oddly, µ-Ziq's Mike Paradinas is in there somewhere in musical disguise) to jagged guitar rebel is complete, for better or for worse.

John Aizlewood

Johanna Burnheart

★★★★

Bär

BURNHEART. DL

German violinist doubles down on her mix of classical, modal jazz and techno.

A fixture on the UK jazz scene playing alongside Rosie Turton, Maisha and Yazz Ahmed, Johanna Burnheart's solo output explores more rarefied territory. A refinement of the bespoke style debuted on 2020's *Burnheart*, Jonny Wickham and Twm Dylan's hooky bass lines combine with Ben Brown's tethered drums and Jonny Mansfield's probing vibraphone to create deeply textured motorik grooves on instrumental standouts Cylla Burna and Fossa Offekonis. While Al MacSween and David Swan ladle in electronica, Burnheart consciously underplays her role, punctuating pulsing bedrocks with stylistic nods to Zbigniew Seifert and a trumpeter's precision. Burnheart's voice is a thing of detached wonder too, whether mirroring her ghostly, echo-treated violin on Ems or traversing left-field chamber pop on Something Cool. A quiet triumph.

Andy Cowan

Hochzeitskapelle + Japanese Friends

★★★★

The Orchestra In The Sky

ALIEN TRANSISTOR. CD/DL/LP

Munich instrumental quintet meet the cream of Japan's underground.

The tradition of chindon'ya – marching bands that parade through Japanese cities – inspired this extraordinary culture-clash. Over a bumper 125 minutes, brass-led (but incorporating viola, banjo and drums) Bavarian folksters Hochzeitskapelle (who include members of The Notwist) invited guests mostly from Japan's rich alt-folk scene, with two sessions from Tokyo and Kobo here combined on two CDs. Mixing instrumentals and song, the mood is more beatific than 'marching', and uncannily site unspecific (Coppepan's sweltering New Orleans shuffle; Nennenno-koroli feels Sicilian; Gagyu is a one-off jazzy blast). Brass bands Zayaendo and Mitamurakandadan dominate the Tokyo tracks, while Tenniscoats singers Saya and Ueno provide an angelic balm. Back in Kobe, acid folkies Eddie Marcon help alchemise Kuroganemochi into pulsating, tropical reggae.

Martin Aston

ELECTRONIC

BY STEPHEN WORTHY

MORITZ VON OSWALD
SILENCIO

Moritz Von Oswald

★★★★

Silencio

TRESOR. CD/DL/LP

Techno pioneer explores synthetic sound and the human voice.

As Basic Channel, Maurizio, and Rhythm & Sound with Markus Ernestus, Moritz Von Oswald set the agenda in the 1990s and 2000s with pioneering ventures into dub and minimal techno. *Silencio* begins – in typically Oswald fashion – with the title track's 12-minute plunge into pared back, abstract melody and pillowy beats. But what follows is evidence of an abiding quest to explore further. With Finnish composer Jarkko Riihimäki and choral group Vocalconsort Berlin, Oswald investigates the relationship between human and synthesized sound. On Luminoso, bass voices lay down a titanic drone, offset by piercing soprano, into which Von Oswald folds in white noise and synthetic distortion. What at first appears to be a repetitive synth note on Volta isn't digitally created but is instead female voices, setting a tempo. Electronic and human sounds have their differences, Von Oswald posits, but there's also distinct synergies revealed here by repetition, reduction and rhythm.

ALSO RELEASED

Shackleton

★★★★

The Scandal Of Time

WOE TO THE SEPTIC HEART! DL/LP

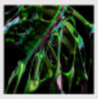
Sam Shackleton has travelled far from his early years as a UK bass and dubstep mainstay. *The Scandal Of Time* is a haunting and utterly unique work that ties together German folk music standards, abstract south Asian and African rhythms and dark, foreboding ambient. These often unnerving electronic fairy tales, built of unfamiliar patterns, are fascinatingly oblique and wholly rewarding.

Jan Nemeček

★★★

Dissolved

REFRACTIONS. DL/LP



Belgrade sound designer and synth experimentalist Nemeček uses a full toolset – modular synths, neural networks, prepared piano – to produce hulking electronic mini-symphonies. The swirls of brooding drone, abstract ambient and distorted bass that characterise *Dissolved* reach their apogee on Shards. Introducing itself gently, like birds awakening for the dawn chorus, it gradually unfurls towards a disturbing, raucous denouement.

Sign Libra

★★★★

Hidden Beauty

RVNG INTL. CD/DL/LP

Latvian artist Agata Melnikova takes familiar modern musical tropes and swooshes them around like a lucky dip at the village fête. The resultant wonky rave music, skeletal '90s R&B and oddball pop is embellished by Melnikova's gauzy vocals – a tumble of coo's, aah's and indecipherable phrases, they add another playful layer to this joyful, idiosyncratic record.

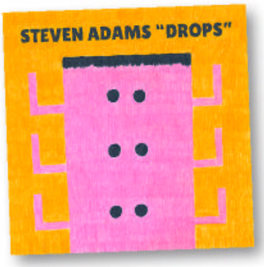
Aïsha Devi

★★★

Death Is Home

HOUNDSTOOTH. DL/LP

There's an identifiable club aesthetic to half-Swiss/half-Nepalese artist Aïsha Devi's music – her bass is predominantly of the rib-rattling variety – although it rarely rouses above glacial pace. Partly a paean to her late father, a drummer, whom Devi never met, *Death Is Home*'s amalgam of south Asian cadences, grime-like minimalism and Devi's ghostly, treated voice is in turns discomforting and meditative. *SW*



Steven Adams

★★★

Drops

FIKA RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Solo album from Broken Family Band veteran offers a British riposte to US indie.

Since calling time on Broken Family Band in 2009, Steven Adams has frequently avoided giving the impression he's gone solo by playing and recording as Singing Adams and Steven Adams and The French Drops. *Drops*, though, is his third LP under his own name. The last such was 2016's *Old Magick*. A many flavoured thing, *Drops* sets the motorik-leaning Chills and American Music Club-esque Living In The Local Void against the third album Velvets-coloured Fascists. Making Holes evokes John Lennon on the downbeat side of *The White Album*. Instant melodies, Adams' intimate voice and observational lyrics bring cohesion. Subjects pondered include the pressures brought by loosening up while on holiday in Holiday Casual and, with Making Holes, the perils of repeatedly ploughing the same emotional furrow. It's taken a while, but urban Britain has generated its very own equivalent of Stephen Malkmus.

Kieron Tyler

Guided By Voices

★★★★

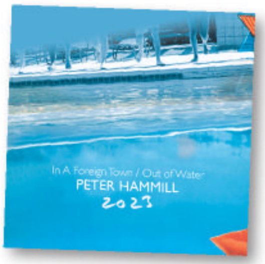
Nowhere To Go But Up

GBV INC. CD/DL/LP

Robert Pollard and band's third album of 2023 and 39th overall.

If there's a 'toppermost of the poppermost' vibe to *Nowhere To Go But Up*'s title, fair enough. Guided By Voices gain energy through tireless toil, and though their prolific nature can make each new album seem less of an event, their latest is special. From the tubular bells glam stomp of The Race Is On, The King Is Dead to the raga-turned-hypnotic-choogle For The Home, this is GBV near the peak of their curious powers, Pollard studiously avoiding repetitive choruses and cramming hooks into free-range verses. As ever, his unique lexicon runs riot, hence Cruel For Rats seems to pun on a certain Squeeze classic, and part of Local Master Airplane runs, "It's liquid business in air city/And I feel shitty." Narrator-wise, Pollard isn't so much unreliable as unfathomable, but his Dadaist indie-pop is still to die for.

James McNair


In A Foreign Town / Out of Water
PETER HAMMILL
2023

Peter Hammill

★★★

In A Foreign Town/ Out Of Water

ESOTERIC. CD/DL

The prog sage revisits his 16th and 17th solo albums.

Hammill was a pioneer in DIY, home-recording his solo LPs even in the '70s. After retiring his K Group quartet in 1985, he embraced the emerging MIDI technology, though the rockers dominating 1988's *In A Foreign Town* were hidebound by stiff rhythms and colourless keyboard washes, and only the three ballads escaped unscathed. With tricky licensing arrangements surrounding that LP and 1989's *Out Of Water* (US label Enigma originally released both), Hammill has solved both legal and sonic issues by revamping the albums. If the drums remain stodgy, the new …*Foreign Town* is brighter and airier, mostly cured of its '80s afflictions. Likewise, *Out Of Water*, though it didn't need much rescuing in the first place, with more relaxed and organic arrangements (bass, guitar, violin and sax from K Group and Van Der Graaf Generator alumni) culminating in A Way Out, one of Hammill's tenderest ballads.

Martin Aston

Lenhart Tapes

★★★

Dens

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

Belgrade-based producer pairs personal and collective memory with folk song.

Vladimir Lenhart's latest incarnation adds three vocalists with folk backgrounds – ethno-musicologist Tijana Stanković, Serbian traditional singers Svetlana Spajić and Zoja Borovčanin. Despite their focus on the Balkan sound, Lenhart Tapes play on the same cosmopolitan territory as Swedish psych-pranksters Goat and fellow Glitterbeat signings Altın Gün. In this eclectic context, storytelling, both from personal and communal perspectives, is key. Using his cassette collection, Lenhart spins a captivating sonic web of samples, hypnotic beats and ethnic melodies. His magpie approach is best captured on Mejremo; its heavy, opiate cloud of sound suffused in drone, akin to La Monte Young and the eerie intensity of The Haxan Cloak. Elsewhere, a dance vibe meets contemplation. From the life-affirming Vodu Brala to mournful Starala Sa, *Dens* succeeds in capturing the life cycle of a folk song.

Irina Shtreis

Faith & Harmony

★★★★

I Heard The Voice

BIBLE & TIRE. DL/LP

Thrilling first album from the all-female family sacred soul sextet formed in 2012.

Greenville, NC's Faith & Harmony have familial links to Johnny Ray Daniels, Dorothy Vines and the Dedicated Men Of Zion, and like them, they sing pulsing-with-life gospel soul. *I Heard The Voice* is their debut album, produced by Bruce Watson and Will Sexton, and recorded live in Memphis, where the six women huddled close around one mike. The tonal blueprint here is 1960s Motown – think the Vandellas, Supremes, Marvelettes – where pop vocals and church harmonies are set to dance party rhythms and warbling organ. The centrepiece is the title track, their joyous reading of the Elizabeth King & The Gospel Souls number, which they energise with ecstatic whooping and hollering, but covers of more traditional fare such as Come See About Me are invigorating too.

Lois Wilson

Bitw

★★★

Rehearse

KLEP DIM TREP. CD/DL/LP

Former surf rocker and Gruff Rhys sidekick genially considers his circumstances.

The closing words of *Rehearse*'s last track, Old Hands are "finally, I settle down." Earlier in its lyrics, Gruff ab Arwel, AKA Bitw, declares he's "hoping I grow old before my time." This inversion of rock'n'roll's stereotypical yen for restlessness and eternal youth encapsulates an album as much about insecurity as it is a scrutiny of a life's benchmarks. Despite its backbone of self-examination, the second solo album from the former mainstay of Welsh surf outfit Y Niwl and long-time Gruff Rhys associate is not downbeat. Instead, it collects 10 liltingly poppy songs which engender a blissful atmosphere. Whether it's the undulating folkiness of When I Was You or Head For A Hometown, which – really – nods to New Order's Your Silent Face, it's clear this north Wales individualist is at ease with his lot, as *Rehearse* exudes warmth.

Kieron Tyler

Ebru Yildiz

Vince Clarke

★★★★

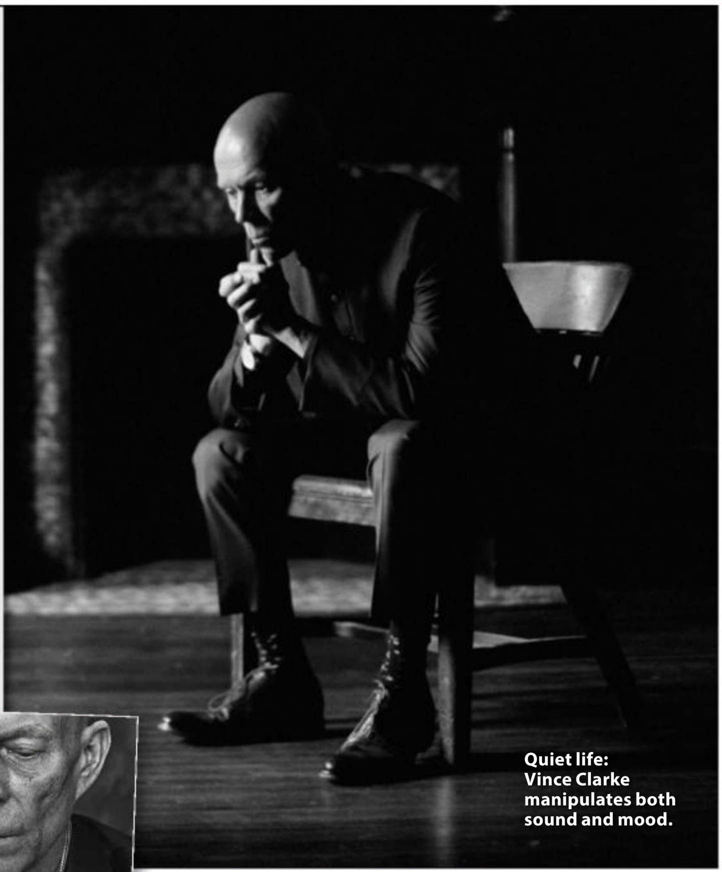
Songs Of Silence

MUTE. CD/DL/LP

Synth-pop lifer steps into solo limelight.

WITH A CV that includes Depeche Mode, Yazoo and Erasure, Vince Clarke has spent more than 40 productive years operating as serial collaborator rather than electronic lone wolf. *Songs Of Silence* sees him finally diverting onto a more solitary path, its suite of dankly atmospheric tracks composed alone on modular synth system Eurorack. There's a dream-logic momentum, the mood often paranoid and propulsive. The heavy-breathing White Rabbit and Scarper come with a prickle of John Carpenter menace, while Last Transmission or Imminent are hyper-vigilant Tangerine Dream. There are times when a less obviously doctored emotion bleeds through, though: the cello-driven The Lamentations Of Jeremiah, Caroline Joy Clarke's operatic vocals on Passage, or Blackleg, the eerie repurposing of a raging political folk song. It's yet another side of Vince Clarke – sound and mood manipulated by a master.

Victoria Segal



Quiet life: Vince Clarke manipulates both sound and mood.

Vince Clarke
Songs of Silence

ROUGH TRADE

LANKUM
[FALSE LANKUM]

LANKUM
False Lankum

ANOHNI
and
the Johnsons
MY BACK WAS A BRIDGE FOR YOU TO CROSS -

ANOHNI AND THE JOHNSONS
My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross

all
of
this
is
chance

LISA O'NEILL
All Of This Is Chance

SLEAFORD MODS
U.K. Grim

MOJO ALBUMS OF THE YEAR FROM ROUGH TRADE RECORDS

ROUGH TRADE

roughtraderecords.com

The toxic avengers

Cult '90s Californian trio get the monument they've long deserved: an 11-LP box set of everything they released during a decade eternally under the radar. By **David Fricke**.

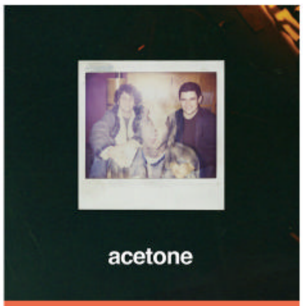
Acetone

★★★★

I'm Still Waiting.

NEW WEST. LP

IN MAY, 1994, only a few weeks after Kurt Cobain's suicide shattered the giddy momentum of alternative rock's mainstream insurrection, the Los Angeles trio Acetone – bassist and lead singer Richie Lee, guitarist Mark Lightcap and drummer Steve Hadley – arrived in Nashville to make what they expected to be their second album. Their interior baggage far outweighed the physical luggage. "We went down there without any songs written because Steve and Richie were too strung out," Lightcap admits in the linernotes here, referring to his bandmates' drug habits at the time. And there were the expectations from Acetone's quietly profound arrival in 1993: a self-titled EP and full-length debut, *Cindy*, that countered the narcissistic ire of grunge with a raw poise of psychedelic dreaming and desert-pilgrim crawl, as if The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, Big Star's *Third* and Spacemen 3's *Playing With Fire* were spinning on the same turntable – at Galaxie 500 speed.

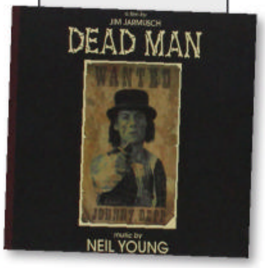


"Acetone played and believed together until they ran out of road. Here is every mile as they recorded it and lived it."

In fact, Acetone's next release – a 1995 mini-album *I Guess I Would*, partly cut in Nashville, finished back in California – was an inspired dodge of that writing block: all country ballad covers (George Jones, John Prine, Johnny Horton) and Olde English trance (The Fugs adapting William Blake). A 10-minute slow burn through Kris Kristofferson's Border Lord was Acetone at their noisy and ascetic finest, spiked with Lightcap's overloaded fuzz and wah wah spasms. Here, too, was a band looking down the road with more clarity than they knew. "Runnin' like you're runnin' out of time," Lee and Lightcap sang in pinched, serrated harmony, as if perched over a boombox mike. "When you're headin' for the border/Lord, you're bound to cross the line." Acetone ended, like Nirvana, with a suicide: in July 2001, Lee took his own life, aged 34.

BACK STORY: VAPOR TALE

● Neil Young founded Vapor Records with his manager Elliot Roberts, launching the imprint with his 1996 soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man and the signing of Jonathan Richman, who made eight LPs for the label. Other releases included one-offs by Vic Chesnutt and Catatonia; solo efforts by Crazy Horse members; and a string of sellers by Canadian twins Tegan And Sara, who signed to Vapor aged 19. "The best gift you can be given as a young artist is the time to develop," Tegan said of their tenure. Vapor effectively ended with Roberts' death in 2019.



I'm Still Waiting is the monument his band has long deserved – everything Acetone released (and then some) during a decade eternally under the radar, in a mesa-like box of 11 vinyl discs. One photograph in the 60-page book of lavishly illustrated history sums up that curse of promise: a poster for two 1993 shows in Britain with Acetone supporting The Verve and billed over the newborn Oasis. In his linernotes, longtime friend Drew Daniel of Matmos cites the prophetic contradiction in Acetone's name, a combination of household science (a toxic solvent used in paint thinner) and playful licence (an exotic cocktail in Kurt Vonnegut's 1963 novel Cat's Cradle): "Its mingled connotations of beautiful craft and poisonous risk would eventually play out." J Spaceman of Spiritualized, another fan, contends in a testimonial that "lacking any record company support meant their focus remained intact." It was a purity that barely kept the lights on – but rarely dimmed.

Lee, Hadley and Lightcap were unlikely mystics. The first two grew up in skateboard country, Orange County, California; Lee met Lightcap, originally from Philadelphia, at the California Institute Of The Arts, where the latter was playing tuba and studying avant-garde music. They first recorded (with a fourth member) as Spinout, a party-punk band, cutting a 1990 LP for the hip-hop label Delicious Vinyl. Those hardcore roots were still showing on the 1993 Acetone EP, the first release in what must have seemed like a golden ticket deal with Vernon Yard, a Virgin subsidiary that issued The Verve's first wax in America.

I'm Gone introduces a power trio in transition, hijacking Nirvana's soft-loud template with custom prayer and fury – Lee and Lightcap's jubilantly rough vocal blend, like the Gallagher brothers with Richard Ashcroft's heavenward gaze; the white-noise Lou Reed storming across the Mojave in Lightcap's guitar break. But the EP ends with Cindy: eight minutes of unbroken spell built on a serpentine bass guitar hook, country-surf twang and campfire-doo wop crooning. Here is everything Acetone did best going forward, in irresistibly slow intimacy, the way it often started in the band's pool-house practice space.

Effectively named for that breakthrough (the song was not included), *Cindy* is a triumph of ecstatic highs and desperate lows made by a band that is vigorously sure of itself but not much else. Come On brings the dark and light in full, equal measure: a languid, tidal stroll *à la* The Velvet Underground's Ocean with haunted chanting ("I'm still waiting") that eventually finds Lee "down on my knees," singing through distortion, wreathed in feedback. The high-speed mischief and powerpop flair in Pinch and Chills make you wonder if there should have been more of that, all along the way, while Louise is a long, gorgeous ballad of soft march and lightly picked guitar – a potential speciality ultimately left to Yo La Tengo.

Acetone's protracted road, via Nashville, to 1995's *If You Only Knew*, is evident right away in the title track with a beat just short of stasis. The songs are in a shorter radio-friendly range but also spare and defeated in tone (the grizzled I Don't Really Care, the brutally frank I've Enjoyed As Much Of This As I Can Stand). The album now stands out more for its attractions (the modal raver 99, the guitars' Bach-like chime in When You're Gone), previewing a decisive rebound on 1997's *Acetone*. Newly sober, energised and signed to Neil Young's Vapor Records, Acetone sound "sunlit", as Daniel puts it, in the *Sunflower*-Beach Boys jump of Every Kiss and Shobud's Marin County trance. And there was a great choogling jam band always hiding inside Acetone, never busting out enough but doing it here like a Wilco blast of Creedence in Chew.

Lee's death left 2000's *York Blvd* in an unintended limbo of epitaph and anti-climax. Added keyboards and cleaner production (even the dreaded Auto-Tune on Lee's singing at points) come with another strong streak of writing and that weirdly motivating insecurity. "You may try and try again/Not to be unsatisfied," goes the sizzling-guitar gravitas of Things Are Gonna Be Alright. "But how long do you go on/Believing things are gonna be alright?" Acetone played and believed together until they ran out of road. Here is every mile as they recorded and lived it.

Liquid gold: Acetone (from left) Mark Lightcap, Richie Lee and Steve Hadley were unlikely mystics.

original recording by sadly no longer with us Reel Recordings boss Mike King – are wild and free and very, very beautiful.

Ben Thompson

On fire: Jimi Hendrix and co "burn the air" at Hollywood Bowl, 1967.

Brian T. Colvil/Authentic Hendrix, LLC

JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE

Jimi Hendrix Experience

★★★★

Jimi Hendrix Experience: Hollywood Bowl, August 18, 1967

EXPERIENCE HENDRIX/LEGACY. CD/DL/LP

Improbable but thrilling: Hendrix as an opening act in the Summer Of Love.

THERE IS no audible applause. A Los Angeles Times critic complained that the leader "did not set his guitar on fire." In fact, Jimi Hendrix dedicates Wild Thing – his flammable showpiece that June at the Monterey Pop Festival – "to ourselves… Might as well, there's nobody else here." It's rock history upside down: five days before the US release of *Are You Experienced*, Hendrix, bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell burn the air at the Bowl but get mostly yawns in return from folk rock fans waiting for The Mamas And The Papas. The 40-minute set is half covers with an extended Catfish Blues; there is a preview blitz of Fire from the new LP; and the fidelity is startlingly clear, taped on the sly by a radio station engineer. "Nice gig, [but] it wasn't our crowd," Mitchell observed later. That would soon change.

David Fricke

If there's HELL below

Various

★★★★

If There's Hell Below

NUMERO GROUP. LP

Thirteen independent label psych/funk jams from 1969-1977.

Many compilations have explored the late-'60s/early-'70s explosion of music influenced by Hendrix, Sly Stone, Curtis Mayfield and Funkadelic – but this intriguing release goes further and deeper. Seeking out real obscurities – many marked by crude recordings or tape sources, which enhances the fascination – *If There's Hell Below* is the sound of black American musicians going further and further out there in the already fertile conjunction of psych and funk. Fuzz and wah wah abound, as well as insistent, quirky grooves. Every track has something going for it, but particular standouts are Little Ed & The Soundmasters Band's It's A Dream – an almost sinister vocal from a preteen singer – Sir Stanley's all-out stomper I Believe, and Iron Knowledge's fuzz-drenched epic of loss, Show-Stopper. What's so great is the sense that all concerned are playing and singing what they want to: add the great stories in the notes, and this is a recommended release.

Jon Savage

Sugar Minott/ Johnny Osbourne

★★★★

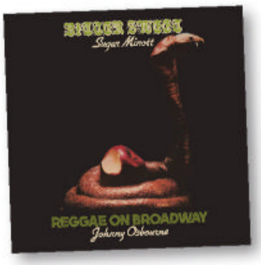
Bitter Sweet/ Reggae On Broadway

DOCTOR BIRD. CD

Two-fer of late-roots/early-dancehall LPs, produced by Prince Jammy.

As the chief engineer at King Tubby's studio, Prince Jammy voiced some of the biggest hits of the mid-1970s and mixed some of the greatest dubs of all time, before becoming a producer in his own right. Sugar Minott's excellent 1979 LP *Bitter Sweet* mixes hard-hitting tales of ghetto life such as This World and Save The Children with lovers rock odes like Never Too Young and I'm Not For Sale; The Revolutionaries provide a rich musical environment and Jammy's subtle balancing enables an optimal listening experience. In contrast, 1983's *Reggae On Broadway* saw Johnny Osbourne spearheading the emerging dancehall style through tough tunes like Lend Me Your Chopper and Rock And Come On; Sly & Robbie and the High Times Players provide a modernised musical backing, the agreeable mixdown courtesy of Jammy and Scientist.

David Katz



Various

★★★

Space Funk 2

SOUL JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Endearing collection of future-funk from a bygone era.

The years covered by this second volume of Soul Jazz's *Space Funk* series – 1976-84 – witnessed an explosion in consumer-level synthesizer technology, welcomed by funk outfits across America seeking to hitch their wagons to Parliament's *Mothership Connection*. Cheese abounds – Alien Starr's vocoder-drenched Music-A-Lizer reminds that nothing dates faster than concepts of what the future might resemble – but there are also plenty of groove-heavy nuggets in this grab-bag of early-rap and later-era funk. The Bobby Deemo Band's More Ounce Rap is an unabashedly Parliafunkadelicment vamp channelling both *Mothership Connection* and Grandmaster Flash's The Message, though it possesses a sinful slink all its own, while Mack Simmons' Skin Tight winningly makes like a dime-store Norman Whitfield production. Meanwhile, the Cro-Magnon digi-funk of Computer Pop, by future Miami bass pioneer Maggotron, is a triumph of spartan synth-bass, primitive drum machine and vicious turntable action.

Stevie Chick

Mike Osborne

★★★★

Starting Fires: Live At The 100 Club, 1970

BRITISH PROGRESSIVE JAZZ. CD/DL

British alto sax eminence shines alongside Alan Skidmore, Louis Moholo and Harry Miller on previously unheard live recording.

Of the several big recent discoveries by the British Progressive Jazz label, this powerhouse live set feels like the most important. Anyone seeking an understanding of the liberating influence the fiercely expressive playing of South African exiles like Moholo and Miller had on a generation of UK jazzers – and an awareness of the extent to which inspiration flowed both ways – will struggle to better the exemplary carnage of these two 21-minute tracks. Osborne's alto and Skidmore's tenor chase each other round the 100 Club with the delirious abandon of yearling spaniels while rhythm section Moholo and Miller knit together an undulating macramé foundation. The results – painstakingly and very effectively mastered from the

Various

★★★★

The Memphis Blues Box

BEAR FAMILY. CD

Twenty CDs of Memphis blues spanning 1914 to '69.

MEMPHIS BLUES BOX

The Memphis Blues Box chronicles the city's blues explosion over 534 songs and 20 CDs, housed in an LP-sized box with a 360-page hardback book. At around £200 it's not cheap – but it is impressive. Beginning with WC Handy, who popularised the 'blues' term with the instrumental Memphis Blues, then joining a line from the pre-war jug bands of Gus Cannon to the post-war elemental R&B of Howlin' Wolf, it provides a soundtrack to a people and place that changed the fabric of America. Big names abound – Memphis Minnie; Elvis; Rufus Thomas; Bobby Bland etc – but it also spotlights less celebrated talents such as Tuff Green, who swung and jumped with the best of them while also giving up his living room for B.B. King to record in.

Lois Wilson

Ahmad Jamal

★★★★

Emerald City Nights: Live At The Penthouse 1966-1968

JAZZ DETECTIVE/ELEMENTAL. CD/DL/LP

Late pianist in expansive form in Seattle, backed by Jamil Nasser and Frank Gant.

AHMAD JAMAL

Captured with crystal clarity by King FM engineer Jim Wilk, this concluding volume of mid-'60s Penthouse sessions focuses on the Pittsburgh-born pianist's multifaceted interpretative gifts on often lengthy, ebbing and flowing covers. Jamal plays suitably tender tribute to his hometown hero Erroll Garner's Misty, before upping the ante with repeated vamps and agile solos detailed with lurching surprises. He takes Henry Mancini's Mr Lucky for a real spin around the houses, creating a swaying, rhythmic misadventure that allows bassist Nasser and drummer Gant ample space to let the grooves breathe. Elsewhere, he tweaks the main theme of Bacharach & David's Alfie into something altogether different via pealing chords and cascading riffs. High-lighting his lightness of touch, it's a genuine treasure trove.

Andy Cowan

R.E.M.

★★★★

Up

CRAFT RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Expanded 25th anniversary edition of the 11th album.

By 1998, R.E.M. were on the last lap. Drummer Bill Berry and producer Scott Litt had gone, both never to be adequately replaced, and it was becoming increasingly clear there would be only fleeting returns to the glory years. The immediate result, recorded in San Francisco, was the downbeat, contemplative but so often beautiful *Up*, where Michael Stipe admits on Sad Professor "dear readers, I'm not sure where I'm headed". This edition adds a 1999 concert – almost half of *Up*, hits, Country Feedback – played to 175 fan club members on the set of teen drama Party Of Five. They're so loose that Michael Stipe interrupts I'm Not Over You with a Billy Corgan anecdote, but he's already made a baldness joke, namechecked The Human League and noted of Berry "he's really happy to not be here right now". It's R.E.M. at their sweetest.

John Aizlewood

Maxx Traxx & Third Rail

★★★★

Maxx Traxx: Third Rail

NUMERO GROUP. LP

Two 1982 soul-funk boogie buried treasures.

Max Traxx, AKA Third Rail, were a multi-racial seven-piece who between 1979 and '82 gigged two shows a night, four nights a week to packed clubs around Chicago. Led by singer-guitarist Steve Robinson, who sounds a lot like Stevie Wonder and could also pen a hit – Walter Jackson's Living Without You is one of his – they mixed jazz, funk, R&B and pop and should have become a major group. Instead, their two albums, both from 1982 – the first *Reachin' For It* as Third Rail, the second self-titled under the name *Maxx Traxx* – disappeared, only to gain cult status decades later. Reissued here for the first time, they are split between irrepressible boogie funk – see the gleeful Don't Touch It! and Let's Have A Party – and soulful ballads: their genuinely emotive Living Without You eclipses Jackson's take.

Lois Wilson

Outkast

★★★★

Aquemini

SONY. LP

25th anniversary vinyl edition of André 3000 and Big Boi's ambitious third LP.

Two years after *ATLiens'* extra-terrestrial visions, Outkast's third LP took the Dirty South on another quantum leap, seamlessly augmenting their sampler-based hip-hop with live musicians. The result is a buoyant future-funk that further empowered the duo's creative ambitions. Perhaps this is the moment when their partnership began to fracture, André 3000's relationship with Erykah Badu opening up his bohemian inclinations while Big Boi kept things real(-ish). But, as its title – a portmanteau blending the pair's contrasting zodiac signs – suggests, *Aquemini's* strength lies in its diversity. Here you'll find deep, sophisticated tracks like the gospelised introspection of Liberation, the playful experimentalism of George Clinton-collab Synthesizer, but also radio-ready anthems like the irresistible Rosa Parks, pointing towards the imminent crossover success of *Stankonia*. "Nothin' lasts forever," they warned on the confessional title track, but while their union held fast, Outkast achieved the unimaginable.

Stevie Chick

Mercyland

★★★

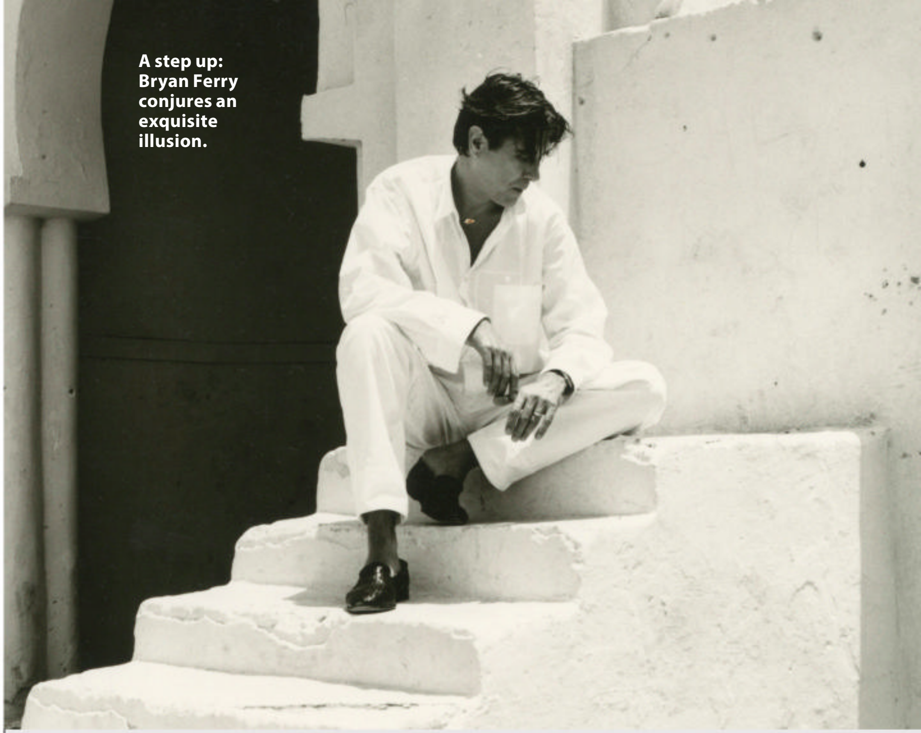
No Feet On The Cowling

PROPELLER SOUND. CD/DL/LP

'Lost' 1989 LP that secured David Barbe's Sugar gig.

When Bob Mould was casting around for foils to flesh out his post-Hüsker Dü power trio Sugar, he didn't look far past David Barbe as a melody-carrying bass player. Until then Barbe was singer/songwriter for Athens, Georgia's Mercyland, a band caught between being a turbo-charged R.E.M. and less lung-busting Hüsker Dü. Or, to put it another way, the perfect previous experience to earn the Sugar shoulder tap. Their one proper LP, 1989's *No Feet On The Cowling*, never really travelled far, failing to get a proper release or distribution. Even remixed and remastered, however, the buzzsaw punk of Ives St Cockelbur, Hüsker Dü-influenced Guessing Time Is Gone, and Replacements-esque Gets My Soul To Vigor struggle to fully match the intensity of their influences, leaving it just short of qualifying as a true lost classic.

Andy Fyfe



A step up: Bryan Ferry conjures an exquisite illusion.

Gavin Evans

Departure lounge

Bryan's ninth solo studio LP gets the deluxe treatment; adding previously unreleased 'lost' studio album, *Horoscope*. By Andrew Male.

Bryan Ferry

★★★★

Mamouna

BMG. CD/DL/LP

BRYAN FERRY first began work on the album that would become *Mamouna* in 1989. Between that year and 1993, when he released the languid covers LP *Taxi*, he suffered some kind of writer's block. Sequestered in his north London studio without a manager or a producer, creating 56-track instrumentals and believing he was, in his own words, "the Duke Ellington of whatever", he recorded an entire album, entitled *Horoscope*, which was finished then shelved; deemed "too fussy, too complex, too dense". Believing the original title to be cursed and running up costs he'd later equate with director Michael Cimino's studio-destroying 1980 vanity project Heaven's Gate, he renamed the work *Mamouna* (Arabic for "good luck") and, in 1991, enlisted the help of Procol Harum guitarist Robin Trower as producer.

Released in 1994, *Mamouna* was greeted positively, but reviews by and large categorised the record as yet another collection of tasteful art-pop in the tradition of Roxy Music Mk 2's creative high-point, *Avalon*. While *Mamouna* undeniably exudes the same eroticised self-absorption as that exquisitely sophisticated exercise in artistic exhaustion, it also takes it somewhere unique and unsettling.

Recorded with a huge ensemble of musicians that included Nile Rodgers, Maceo Parker, and former Average White Band drummer Steve Ferrone, plus fellow Roxy alumni Phil Manzanera, Andy Mackay and Brian Eno (credited with adding "sonic distress", "swoops" and "awareness") *Mamouna* is the sound of Ferry's '90s studio obsessiveness moving into a kind of delicious, limbo-like precariousness, where multi-tracked bass, guitar, horns, piano, backing vocals and Ferry's own iridescent synth undertones contribute to an atmosphere of lonely space-age drift. On stand-out tracks such as the eerie, despairing Which Way To Turn and the pulsing dead-end seductions of The 39 Steps, the mood is one of remote liminal luxury, of First Class departure lounges and five-star hotel lobbies suffused with overwrought existential despair. Yet what gives the album its soul, its humanity, is Trower's decision to place Ferry's melancholy, lived-in vocals front-and-centre, a surprisingly moving choice that creates the sense of a real life and a real person gradually coming apart in these opulent, sumptuous nowheres.

By rights, the earlier shelved album, *Horoscope*, also included here, should sound "too fussy, too complex, too dense". It doesn't. Urban soul workout Desdemona, reworked on *Mamouna* as NYC, has a nervy, agitated aspect that reinvigorates the somewhat clichéd 'Big Apple' lyrics, while the lounge-motorik groove of Raga is utterly compelling, a hypnotic journey into the enigmatic depleted heart of Ferry-soul. A real treat, for those who invest in the 3-CD edition, is 10 tracks chronicling *Mamouna's* creation. To hear the piano-and-vocal demos of The Only Face and Your Painted Smile, or electronic instrumentals Robot and Horoscope, is to hear both the pain and artistry at the heart of this multi-textured work of exquisite illusion, the anguish beneath the opulence.

MAMOUNA
BRYAN FERRY

Super tramps: Thin Lizzy (from left) Eric Bell, Phil Lynott and Brian Downey, 1973.

Getty

Thin Lizzy

★★★★

Vagabonds Of The Western World: 50th Anniversary Edition

DECCA. CD/DL/LP

A 3-CD, 4-LP box adding radio sessions, demos and rarities.

THIN LIZZY's third album, their last as a trio and last with guitarist Eric Bell, was exploratory and transformative. They had yet to crystallise their sound, and their attendant debut hit Whiskey In The Jar's ancient folk roots would only confuse matters, but many of the ingredients that made the later, classic-era Lizzy so potent already figured: hence Lynott the quixotic romantic (Little Girl In Bloom) and Lynott the macho Lothario (The Rocker) slogging it out. Randolph's Tango, replete with clave and Spanish guitar solo, demonstrates Lizzy's early-onset versatility, while the RTE Radio Eireann session from 1973 in which Bell recreates the Doctor Who theme reminds us he was right up there with Lizzy's more celebrated axe-heroes. It's Lynott's inherent charisma that shines through, though, his deceptively easeful-sounding vocals pitch perfect and seductive.

Vagabonds of the Western World
Thin Lizzy

James McNair

Fela Kuti

★★★★

Box Set 6

PARTISAN. LP

Six-LP box set of Afrobeat pioneer's work curated by the actor Idris Elba.

The earliest of the six LPs collected here is 1971's *Open & Close*, on which Kuti lays the foundations for Afrobeat protest, musically with the dance craze title track and lyrically with a charged reading of folk song Gbagada Gbogodo. The most impactful is 1980's *Music Of Many Colours*, which was recorded with Roy Ayers while the pair were touring together in Nigeria and sees vibes and keys communing in cross-cultural, pan-diasporic solidarity. Then three from 1977: *Stalemate*, *Opposite People* and *I Go Shout Plenty!!!*, the former featuring Lester Bowie, the latter unreleased until 1986, and all driven by a percussive energy, jazz spirit and a desire for change. Also includes 1984's blistering *Live In Amsterdam*, recorded at the Paradiso and co-produced by Dennis Bovell.

Lois Wilson

Dave Evans
Elephantasia

Dave Evans

★★★★

Elephantasia

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Another rediscovered gem from the overlooked '70s singer-songwriter.

Some musicians attain obscurity for understandable reasons, but the late Dave Evans was a dazzling fingerstyle guitarist – in the tradition of Davey Graham, Jansch and Renbourn – and a talented songwriter, with a warm, easy-going vocal style. He only started playing aged 23, then made his own guitars, and recorded his 1971 debut, *The Words In Between*, aged 30. He released three more, and in 1977 moved into ceramics and instrument repair. This, his second album, from 1972, has a freewheeling feel. It was recorded at home, released on the hip folk label The Village Thing and beloved by John Peel. The instrumental Ten Ton Tasha is dedicated to his cat, and on the poignant St Agnes Park, Evans navigates some lovely chord changes with finely articulated picking. Beauty Queen has a ragtime buoyancy and the piano lines on Only Blue give it a feel akin to Nick Drake.

Mike Barnes

Cymande

★★★★

Second Time Round

PARTISAN. CD/DL/LP

50th anniversary edition of London-based funk fusionists' groove-laden second LP.

Widely sampled by the hip-hop glitterati, Cymande were unsung heroes of black British music before last year's Getting It Back documentary shone a light on their talents. Recorded after a lengthy US tour, *Second Time Round* ploughs the same furrow as 1972's self-titled debut, an electric hybrid of Afrobeat, funk, jazz, reggae and calypso that weaves around three percussionists' syncopated Nyabinghi rhythms and Steve Scipio's bouncy bass lines. Never cluttered or overbearing, standouts Anthracite and Fug burst with vibrant life, a mix of beeping horns and tasteful solo sax and flute turns, the latter offset by Ray King's James Brown-ish call-and-response pleas for unity. While they even break down into dub on closing leg-stretcher Them And Us, it's slightly undercooked compared to *Cymande*, with outstanding grooves sometimes left begging for better songs.

CYMANDE
SECOND TIME ROUND

Andy Cowan

Tatsuya Nakamura

★★★★

Locus

BBE JAZZ MASTERCLASS SERIES. CD/DL/LP

Compelling single-microphone 1984 recording gets its moment in the sun.

Far from succumbing to the law of diminishing returns, the quality of delicacy turned up by J-Jazz truffle hounds Tony Higgins and BBE seems to get more gamey and intense as the series continues. Initially steeped in the quaalude marinade of afterhours Shinjuku jazz kissas and then further fermented in the fragrant barrels of the New York loft jazz scene, percussionist and drummer Nakamura's fluid approach to his percussion-heavy septet bears rich dividends for the listener over four diverse and constantly evolving tracks. There are hints of late King Crimson as well as mid-period Weather Report in the potent 12-minute opener, with the wide-open spaces of the improvised finale, Ballad, giving room for meditative fervour as well as quiet reflection.

Ben Thompson

CONSCIOUS CONSUMER
X-Ray Spex

X-Ray Spex

★★★★

Conscious Consumer

DO YOURSELF IN. LP

First time on vinyl for 1995 second LP featuring a reconciled Poly Styrene and Lora Logic.

In 1995, Poly Styrene and Lora Logic went into the studio for the first time together since making 1977's debut single Oh Bondage Up Yours! to record X-Ray Spex's second and final album. Produced by Styrene and put down in London with a line-up completed by original bassist Paul Dean and Red Spectre (AKA Kula Shaker frontman Crispian Mills), it took their original rebel stance – vibrant, anarchic, feminist – and made it more (Brit)pop. Styrene's voice remains raw and unfettered, and her messages – about ecology, junk food and unity – still resonate, while Logic's sax gloriously honks and squawks throughout. Had X Ray Spex just been starting out, they might have palled around with Huggy Bear or Elastica. As it was, the album went largely ignored – but the music remains undimmed.

Lois Wilson

Wes Montgomery & Wynton Kelly Trio

★★★★

Maximum Swing

RESONANCE. CD/DL/LP

First official release of guitarist/pianist's electric 1965 dates at NY's Half Note.

WES MONTGOMERY
WYNTON KELLY TRIO

Captured in the wake of 1965's *Smokin' At The Half Note* with Miles Davis's '50s pianist Wynton Kelly, drummer Jimmy Cobb and a revolving cast of bassists, *Maximum Swing*'s title is no word of a lie. A mostly straight-ahead mix of hard boppers and blues ballads with a sophisticated edge, Montgomery excels on his own compositions, from a brooding, unaccompanied Mi Cosa and wistful I Remember You to a bright, energised Four On Six whose extended solos spotlight his chordal mastery. Pianist Kelly is a powerful counterpoint, cajoling and challenging Montgomery to hit more inspired heights, epitomised by a lyrically assured run-through of All The Things You Are that encapsulates all his unshowy, freewheeling skill and effortless technique.

Andy Cowan

A test of faith

Both experimental shows at the fabled Tokyo arena released in full. By **David Fricke.**

Tokyo story: Dylan recast his canon as arena pomp in 1978.

Bob Dylan

★★★★

The Complete Budokan 1978

COLUMBIA/LEGACY. CD/DL/LP

BOB DYLAN
The Complete Budokan 1978

BOB DYLAN had a lot on his mind in August, 1977: the messy end of his first marriage; the new songs coming from the wreckage; a world tour in the next year. Then he heard that Elvis Presley had died. "Hearing him for the first time was like busting out of jail," Dylan once said. When the Memphis flash snuck a cover of the Hibbing bard's Tomorrow Is A Long Time onto a 1966 film soundtrack, Dylan called it "the one recording I treasure the most."

His 1978 tour was, in return, a tribute fit for the King: Dylan leading an 11-piece band that combined the massed picking and choral glow of his Rolling Thunder caravan with the imperial-pop scale of Presley's Vegas act – plus hints of Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band. Over two-hour-plus sets with deep-cut shuffles every night, Dylan recast his canon to date – protest nuggets, electric surrealism; the high-mountain noir of *Blood On The Tracks* – as arena pomp, with a trickster's glee. A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall became instrumental walk-on music with cantina guitars and saxophone by Phil Spector session vet Steve Douglas.

The porch-song minimalism of I Threw It All Away turned into power-ballad melodrama. Girl From The North Country was tender longing wrapped in church organ, Dylan singing with striking, humbled clarity.

Naturally, those songs did not appear on the 1978 double album *At Budokan*, taped early in the tour on February 28 and March 1 at the fabled Tokyo arena and intended only for Japanese fans until import sales forced Columbia to go worldwide. Skewed by the time limits on a side of vinyl, the album was "a shock, a sacrilege and an unexpectedly playful bonanza", as Janet Maslin wrote in her Rolling Stone review, without enough of each to give a fair tally of Dylan's hits and misses as he tested the endurance and multiple lives in his songs. And to be frank, this generously expanded account won't make that dancing flute in Mr Tambourine Man and All Along The Watchtower any easier to take.

But, *The Complete Budokan 1978* is a richer picture of this restless nerve at work. Dylan opens each night, after the overture, pulling his roots to the fore, covering relics by Billy Lee Riley and Tampa Red. Going, Going, Gone from *Planet Waves* is country soul taken at a wounded man's gait, while Oh, Sister from *Desire* has growling sax over a coltish '60s-pop beat, as if Dylan has walked into a Shangri-Las session. One of his biggest risks here – It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding), pumped up with big-band mettle – is an ingenious, gripping score.

Budokan 1978 is also illuminating as a prelude. These gigs are basically open rehearsals for the sound of *Street-Legal*, cut that spring. And Dylan's turn to gospel is already here in the fire of his female singers. The March 1 take of *New Morning*'s The Man In Me, lit up like a Sunday hymn, should have been on the '78 album. But it's here – like salvation, better late than never.

Joel Bernstein

the kinks
THE JOURNEY
PART 2

The Kinks

★★★

The Journey Part 2

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Volume 2 celebrating 60 years of The Kinks; konceptually konfusing.

Curated by Ray Davies, this compilation is thematically, rather than chronologically, linked to give 'the big picture'. So, side one of the first disc is titled The World Around The Journeyman Starts To Crumble As His Life Is Turned Upside Down and includes '60s landmarks such as Till The End Of The Day along with lesser known cuts like 1974's Scrapheap City. While side four, Despair Turns To Elation, takes in three previously unissued 1975 live tracks from a London New Victoria Theatre show, including the excellent Everybody's A Star (Starmaker). It all begs the question, though: who is this aimed at? Surely beginners would be better served with a '60s greatest hits, *The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society* and go from there; while completists are left with songs they have numerous times and hanging on for a full concert release.

Lois Wilson

Various

★★★★★

Hot House: The Complete Jazz At Massey Hall Recordings

CRAFT RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Definitive collection of "the greatest jazz concert ever."

Seventy years ago, five of the founding fathers of bebop – the artfully frenetic jazz school that revolutionised music – performed in Toronto for a one-off. Charlie 'Bird' Parker (alto sax), Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet), Bud Powell (piano), Charles Mingus (bass) and Max Roach (drums) gathered for this original super-session. It was later discovered that Mingus's bass had been under-recorded, so he partly overdubbed it upon return to New York. This remastered set presents both Mingus's refurbished tracks as well as the full concert. Highlights include Dizzy's Salt Peanuts and A Night In Tunisia, Roach's swinging solo Drum Conversation and the top bop classic title track. Despite Parker and Powell's ragged health, Bird and company are in full flight in this astonishing collaboration, ascending from both a literal and metaphorical stage.

Michael Simmons

TP Orchestre Poly-Rythmo

★★★★

Le 'Sato' 2

ACID JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

A triple whammy out of Dahomey: psychedelic vodou funk.

Though Poly-Rythmo are now one of Africa's most covetable dance bands, this mid-'70s LP has only ever existed in an unexplored netherworld. After 1974's *Le 'Sato'*, their label, Albarika Store, issued this second volume in the same sleeve (a different catalogue number was handwritten on the back). Consequently, there's no Discogs listing for *Le 'Sato' 2* and cratediggers may not know they own it. It's primo Poly-Rythmo, however, with Vincent Ahéhéhinnou as featured vocalist and Mélomé Clément's guitar the driving force beside the vodou drummers. The closing track, Je N'En Peux Plus, is far poppier than we're used to, but funk is the order of the day on the other four. Upping the oddity value, General Gowon pays tribute to the Nigerian leader who brutally defeated the Biafran secessionists before being overthrown in July 1975. Could that explain the original's low-key release?

David Hutcheon

Mário Castro Neves & Samba S.A.

★★★

Mario Castro Neves & Samba S.A.

MR BONGO. CD/DL/LP

1967 bossa/samba-jazz rarity beloved by cratediggers.

After playing together in samba-rock group Jovem Braza, pianist/arranger Mário Castro Neves, double-bassist Novelli and drummer Normando formed Samba S.A. with female vocalists Biba Rubim and Thaís do Amaral. Their self-titled debut, released by RCA, is a decent set that has plenty of winners, especially tension-filled opener Candomblé (sampled by Cut Chemist on Povo De Santo) and rousing dance number Nanã, as well as up-tempo scat-vocal De Brincadeira, and a relaxed rendition of Antonio Carlos Jobim's Corcovado. Enveloped in a cool jazz atmosphere with subtle flourishes from Castro Neves and Novelli, the musicianship is assured throughout. The only missteps come in a few vain crossover attempts with diluted appeal, such as an ill-fitting rendition of the oft-covered Bye Bye Blackbird, desultory original Yearning Lovers, and an awkward adaptation of Chris Montez's Keep Talking.

David Katz

MÁRIO CASTRO NEVES
& SAMBA S.A.

FILE UNDER...

Fire in Babylon: Bob Marley & The Wailers blaze a trail on their 1973 Island debut.

Michael Putland/Retna/Avalon

Flame on!

With flash packaging and a title that meant "go to hell", The Wailers' Island debut was a bold opening shot. But did it find its target? By **Jim Irvin**.

AMONG SEVERAL myths surrounding The Wailers' *Catch A Fire* ★★★★ (Island) – back again with 50th anniversary three-disc sets on CD and vinyl – is that its sweetened, UK-centric mix led to the demise of the original trio, that Island's Chris Blackwell had forced white musicians upon Marley and that he wanted the band credited as Bob Marley & The Wailers. The latter had already happened. Two Jamaican LPs produced by Lee Perry, *Soul Rebels* and *Soul Revolution Part II*, had been billed that way. If anything, at this point at least, Blackwell was keen to maintain the image of The Wailers as a rebel gang that might intrigue a rock audience.

Also, Marley had already distanced himself from Wailers Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingston in 1971 when Johnny Nash's manager Danny Sims took him to Sweden to write songs for a forthcoming Nash movie. Marley enjoyed Sweden. The soundtrack didn't work out, but Nash took several of Bob's songs for his debut CBS album, *I Can See Clearly Now*, including Stir It Up (written in 1967), a UK (and later US) hit. Sims landed Marley a deal with CBS too. Nash's band included keyboard player John 'Rabbit' Bundrick, who'd also contributed songs to the album, they cut one Bob Marley 45 in 1972, Reggae On Broadway, which flopped. However, all this activity had broadened Marley's horizons, showing him his music had international potential.

Sims blew it by promising The Wailers a support tour with Nash, delivering only a lone show in Bexhill-on-Sea in Sussex, then leaving the band stranded in London (having locked away their passports) while he and Nash flew to the US. Marley and The Wailers were understandably pissed off. They turned to tour manager Brent Clarke, who suggested they meet Chris Blackwell.

Coincidentally, Blackwell's dream of a reggae rebel he could sell to rock audiences had just walked out when Jimmy Cliff unexpectedly left the label. When The Wailers walked in, he immediately saw an alternative. He offered to buy out Marley's CBS deal and provide a decent budget to record an LP in Jamaica that could be mixed with an eye on the international market. Marley was happy to have Bundrick involved, and approved the additions Blackwell oversaw in London, even though his bandmates scoffed at them. By the time *Catch A Fire* came out in April 1973, Marley had quietly taken over Blackwell's Jamaican base at 56 Hope Road, Kingston. That was when the division between Marley and The Wailers widened.

Highly regarded subsequently, it's therefore assumed that *Catch A Fire*'s roots reggae with a rock garnish was revolutionary in its day. That The Wailers had recorded a whole album from scratch, not simply compiled previously available singles, was an innovation, but its hybridised sound didn't particularly grab Jamaican fans and was still too unusual to find a sizeable British audience. The elaborate Zippo lighter sleeve got more attention than the music. An estimated 14,000 copies sold outside Jamaica. Enough to win it a low chart placing in the US, surprisingly.

This new edition presents the original album with an impressive BBC In Concert recording from May 1973, which highlights how The Wailers used restraint to transmit power, plus a disc of out-takes and instrumentals from the Jamaican sessions. These are good to have, though not as satisfying as the complete Jamaican mix which emerged earlier this century.

When this album hits, as on Stir It Up, a masterclass in letting the vibe do the work (with smokey wah wah added by Memphis guitarist Wayne Perkins), or on Concrete Jungle and the fierce Slave Driver, it still feels fresh and significant, so we assume it felt so then. To some it surely did, but actually the formula wasn't quite right. This wasn't the sound that would set the world alight. That was to come.

Bob Marley and The Wailers
Catch A Fire

"When this album hits, it still feels fresh and significant."

the kinks 60

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12 **Manchester** Bridgewater Hall
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Heatmiser

★★★

The Music Of Heatmiser

THIRD MAN. DL/LP

Elliott Smith's pre-acclaim quartet churns to life.

A three-minute trouncing called Dirt, a savage Cavity Search single about alienation, an ultra-barbed Beatles cover: it is tempting to overlook Heatmiser as just another Pacific Northwest also-ran of the early '90s, with gnarly riffs pushed into the red and lyrics about being pointless, ostracised or alone. But Heatmiser guitarist and backing vocalist Elliott Smith soon emerged as a generational voice of sweet sadness, forever elevating the quartet at least to footnote status. But this bountiful excavation of their earliest recordings is plenty stirring, even if you've only stopped in to hear Smith's voice slip through cracks in the distortion. Big on the Pixies, The Who and Mudhoney, co-singer Neil Gust was as melodic as he was angry, fighting his way into coming out amid that often-androgenic scene. Less a revelation than an affirmation of the many shapes frustration can take, *The Music Of Heatmiser* is louder and prouder than a mere snapshot of Smith's genesis – though, of course, it is that, too.

Grayson Haver Currin

Myriam Gendron

★★★★

Not So Deep As A Well

BASIN ROCK. CD/DL/LP

Source singer: Canadian's delightful Dorothy Parker settings re-emerge.

"I had my first child two months after the record was released, so I slowed down before I even started running," said Quebecois book dealer Myriam Gendron, elegantly explaining why she failed to build on the flutter of interest in this collection inspired by Algonquin Round Table writer Dorothy Parker's poems. Released in 2014, *Not So Deep As A Well* harks a good way further back, wobbly recordings plus Gendron's spangly guitar-work and gamine vocals sending a Cat Power/Karen Dalton/Ivor Cutler shiver through defiantly slanty songs like Solace, Recurrence and the Jackson C Frank-ish Threnody. Near contemporary tracks Bric-à-brac and the haunted The Small Hours have been appended to the running order of the original Feeding Tube release, but *Not So Deep As A Well* retains its essential weightlessness regardless. Intense, sparkling, delicate, but really, barely there at all.

Jim Wirth

Shack

★★★★

Here's Tom With The Weather

SHACK SONGS. CD/LP

Mersey meteorology from ex-Pale Fountains brothers.

Heroin so washed through Shack it seemed something had gone awry at the printer, and they'd meant to call themselves Smack. The Head brothers' opiates era peaked with the wonderful 1997 album *The Magical World Of The Strands*, released as Michael Head Introducing The Strands: narcotic vistas mixed with maritime reverie. Here, in Mersey Arthur Lee mode with On The Terrace, someone is "waiting for my man to come". But drugs are outweighed by warmth, structural complexity, and the occasional *Sgt. Pepper's*-ish fantasia. Michael Head's common-touch poeticism and auteur-ish musical reach puts him closer to the films of the late Terence Davies than Trainspotting. From the mariachi and tempo changes of Meant To Be to John Head's bittersweet Miles Apart, this rich and cozy 2003 record highlights a strong heritage – one that sits well beside the older Head's clean-and-serene current work leading Michael Head & The Red Elastic Band.

Roy Wilkinson

COMING NEXT MONTH...

Bill Ryder-Jones, Sleater-Kinney (below), Gruff Rhys, Green Day, Aretha Franklin, Mott The Hoople, Roberta Flack, Khruangbin, Spiritualized, Willie Nelson.

Little Rope

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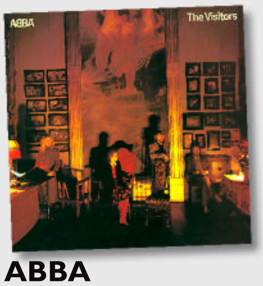


ABBA

★★★★

The Visitors

UNIVERSAL. LP

For its 40th anniversary (in 2021… they won't be rushed) ABBA's eighth on 2-LPs, a singles box and 7-inch pic-discs. Darkside brilliance fuelled by interior anguish (divorce songs When All Is Said And Done and One Of Us Is Lying) and a broader malaise (Soldiers' Cold War pop), it was their final word. Until it wasn't. *JB*

Black Sabbath

★★★★

Hand Of Doom 1970-1978

BMG. LP

Eight albums featuring the classic line-up, from the first self-titled LP to *Never Say Die!*, transposed onto comely picture discs. Yes you've heard it all before, but the metal frisson of the first five, as they revolve evilly, cannot be denied. *IH*

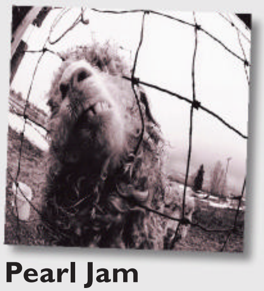
Mike Makhalemele & Winston Mankunku Ngozi

★★★★

The Bull And The Lion

WE ARE BUSY BODIES. DL/LP

1976 meeting of two South African jazz sax titans shows both Makhalemele's mastery of the lingering note and Mankunku's carefree, lyrical approach. *AC*



Pearl Jam

★★★★

Vs

LEGACY. DL/LP/MC

Pearl Jam's freaked-by-fame 1993 epic gets a 30th anniversary remaster (on 1-LP clear vinyl or 2-LP black). But the new 'Atmos Spatial Audio Mix' on Apple Music is a genuine revelation, big on W.M.A.'s percussive drama and powering Rearviewmirror's embattled blitzkrieg to new levels of hurt. *KC*

Various

★★

Bullshit Detector

CRASS. LP

All three volumes of Crass's early '80s compilations back on vinyl. A ragbag of demos, rehearsals and home-taped experiments, from Andy T's rant against commercialism to Action Frogs' unplugged electric guitar flurry. The anything-goes ethos is more miss than hit and, for audiophiles especially, caution is advised. *AC*

Various

★★★★

…And You Don't Stop: A Celebration Of 50 Years Of Hip Hop

TOMMY BOY. LP

A cut above most cash-in comps for hip-hop's golden jubilee, thanks to narrow label focus and an unfussy parade of anthems by Afrika Bambaataa, Stetsasonic, De La Soul, Digital Underground et al, undiminished by time. *AC*

Various

★★★★

Senza Decoro: Liebe & Anarchia In Switzerland 1980-1990

STRUT. CD/DL/LP

DJ Mehmet Aslan's 18-track Swiss post-punk dive mixes Peel faves Lilliput, Café Türk's clippy exotica, Die Welttraumforscher's wheezy hauntology and Dr Chattanooga & The Navarones' wild dubby psychedelia. *AC*

Violent Femmes

★★★★

Violent Femmes

CRAFT RECORDINGS. CD/LP

Now aged 40 and on 3-LP or 2-CD deluxe ed, the cult Milwaukee trio's debut retains its carnal teen vitality, ricocheting between brash, skiffle punk and vulnerability. Comes with a replica 7-inch (Ugly/Gimme The Car), only slightly gawkier demos and raw live tracks so clear you hear the giggles. *JB*

Neil Young

★★★★★

Archives Vol I 1963-1972

REPRISE. CD

An agenda-setting act of curation returns in its original folding box, like a Rubik snake with 8-CDs tracing Young's first decade: from The Squires to his brittle solo debut, via CSNY on to *Harvest*. Live, unreleased, and alternate cuts abound. *JB*

RATINGS & FORMATS

Your guide to the month's best music is now even more definitive with our handy format guide.

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MOJO CLASSIC	EXCELLENT	GOOD	DISAPPOINTING	BEST AVOIDED	DEPLORABLE

Pure and simple: Reet Hendrikson had "an authenticity and sincerity to her sound."

Courtesy Antony Inglis Hall

CREDITS

Tracks: Meil Aiaäärne Tänavas/ Kiigelaul/Haanja Miis/Oh Mina Väike Mehekene/Jaan Lä'eb Jaanitulele/ Karjase Pühapäev – Kirbuga Kirikusse/ Lauliku Lapsepõli/ Iirekene/Kui Mina Alles Noor Veel Olin/ Mardi Laul/ Vennakene, Hellakene/Pill Oll' Helle

Personnel: Reet Hendrikson (voice, guitar)

Producer: Andres Raudsepp, Mel Crosby (engineer)

Released: 1969

Recorded: Andres Raudsepp's apartment and Mel Crosby's studio, Toronto

Current availability: Moved-By-Sound reissue, 2023

Estonia Mundi

Thawed this month from music's permafrost: beauteous folk songs of survival from a small nation in peril.

Reet Hendrikson

Reet

REINDEER, 1969

IN 1968, a few years after arriving in Toronto, Andres Raudsepp first discovered the magical music of Reet Hendrikson. Following a five-year stint in the Canadian army, the 30-year-old Estonian-born secondary school teacher began to immerse himself in the city's Estonian community and its music.

"Estonia had lost its independence during the Second World War," he explains, referring to the Soviet occupation that began in 1940 and ended in 1991. "So the exiles made sure new communities were super-active. Choral music and folk dancing became extremely popular. By performing in front of Canadian and American audiences we managed to direct their attention to the unfortunate situation in our homeland."

After performing with small dance bands, often singing Estonian translations of American pop songs, Raudsepp became programme director of Estonian cultural seminar Metsaülikool (or 'Forest University'). "About that time Reet had moved to the USA on a Fulbright scholarship," explains Raudsepp. "She showed up at Metsaülikool with a guitar and began entertaining us with Estonian folk songs. Everyone, about a hundred of us on the beautiful, forested campgrounds, were utterly delighted."

Born in Estonia in 1944, months before the USSR's takeover, Hendrikson had been raised in Sweden but spoke Estonian like a native. As a result, her phrasing and knowledge of Estonian folk songs and poems struck a chord with the young ex-pats at Metsaülikool, particularly Raudsepp. "After the seminar I decided to take her to a studio where I'd recorded my first album [1968's *On Aeg Antud Laulda*] with my friend, Mel Crosby. Like me, Mel quickly became enraptured with Reet's music and the simplicity and clarity of her voice."

As soon as Hendrikson realised Raudsepp and Crosby planned to cut an album with her, she began to expand her repertoire, collaborating with Estonian composer and music historian Kaljo Raid and the poet Jyri Kork, who'd previously translated US pop songs for Raudsepp.

"Her choice of Estonian folk songs had never been heard in such a format," says Raudsepp, "there was an authenticity and sincerity to her sound. She seemed part of the music."

For non-Estonians, what beguiles about Hendrikson's music is the sweet, melodic purity of her voice, which accentuates the melancholy poetry of the Estonian language, while her unadorned yet intricate guitar playing lends a narrative depth to these tales of lowly serfdom, talking mice, and hearts full of sadness. And while songs such as the poignant Kui Mina Alles Noor Veel Olin (When I Was A Child) or medieval Halloween song Mardi Laul (about singing beggars who promise to bestow good luck on households if they are fed well) might initially suggest the hushed, vulnerable balladry of Vashti Bunyan and Sibylle Baier, Hendrikson's style (and her Davey-Graham-meets-Segovia-style playing) is perhaps closer to the music of Arleta or Veronique Chalot, lone female voices finding new narrative spaces inside their own country's folklore.

Although mastered in Mel Crosby's studio, the record was chiefly recorded in Raudsepp's apartment, lending the songs and Hendrikson's delivery an in-the-room intimacy that belied her quiet politeness. "Her presence was formal and focused," says Raudsepp. "She was quite scholarly and became very interested in early music and old musical instruments. Mel was quite taken in by her talent and her beauty. During the recording, Reet seemed to develop a cough, which meant extra re-recording for Mel. It was very much a labour of love."

Released on Raudsepp's Reindeer Records label, *Reet* sold respectably in two pressings of a thousand records each. Later, Hendrikson briefly moved to Salzburg where she took a course in music therapy. Then, after a stay in Boston where she played occasionally with local folk musicians, she returned to Sweden, working for the Swedish National Radio Archives and attending summer courses in music education at Austria's Orff Institute. She died in Stockholm in the autumn of 2000.

"I telephoned her a few times when she lived in Boston but our connections slowly faded," says Raudsepp. "I remember greeting her briefly on newly independent Estonian soil in 1996 when she was providing music from the Swedish National Radio Archives for The Estonian Radio Symphony, the Philharmonic Chamber Choir, and Estonian folk groups such as Heinavanker and Linnamuusikud. She could easily have developed a repertoire for a second album but there was never anybody around to help her record it. I felt her sense of independence, so I did not attempt to influence her."

In the post-internet age, a word-of-mouth fanbase for Hendrikson's LP began to grow in Estonia. In 2008, Raudsepp organised a CD release for *Reet*, and in 2010 the 26th Estonian Song And Dance Festival featured a tribute to her. Another celebration followed in Toronto in 2016, also organised by Raudsepp. Now the album that started it all is being reissued in Europe. "I hope listeners appreciate the purity and simplicity of her music," says Rausdepp, "as well as the beauty of the Estonian language."

Andrew Male

Reet is available via moved-by-sound.bandcamp.com; Andres Raudsepp has been performing and promoting Estonian music for more than 50 years. He currently contributes articles in English and in Estonian to Eesti Elu (Estonian Life).

"She seemed part of the music."

ANDRES RAUDSEPP

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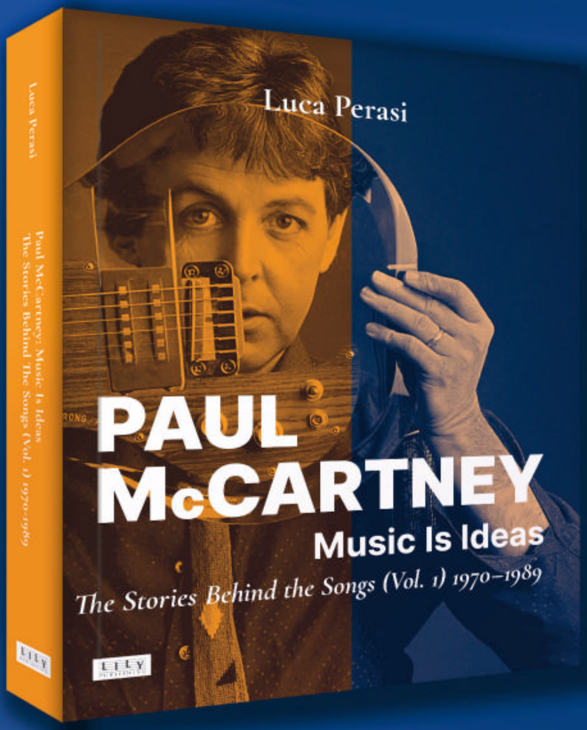
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You've got Mael: Sparks in 1977 – Russell (left) and Ron are now in their sixth decade of making music.

The Best Of 2023

Sparks

Two magnificent Mael specimens, examined by **John Aizlewood**.

THEY'RE QUITE the pair, the Mael boys: Ron, 78, and his baby brother Russell, 75. Together as Sparks, they're in their sixth decade of making albums. They've had their troughs, but those troughs have been commercial rather than artistic. Yet they've usually been popular somewhere: first the UK after 1974's *Kimono My House*, then France, the US (West Coast only), Germany, the UK again and now seemingly everywhere from Austria to Australia.

Russell is Ron's muse and Sparks' producer since 1986's *Music That You Can Dance To*. The songs are Ron's. "I'm not a genius," Russell readily admits, "but my brother is."

The teetotal, drug-free Maels from Pacific Palisades have never married, although Russell has wed Jacqueline Kennedy, an unidentified Martian ("boy am I sorry") and himself ("I'm very happy together") in song.

From 1971's self-titled *Halfnelson* (re-titled *Sparks*, as was the band, a year later) to this year's *The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte*, the pair have remained faithful to each other, even during the grim six-year hiatus between 1988's much-underrated *Interior Design* and *Gratuitous Sax & Senseless Violins*, the comeback which extended their lifespan by decades.

They've been less faithful to any musical style, lurching in and out of art rock, pop, synth rock, just rock and, of late, Sparksrock, an ever-evolving amalgam of the lot, with classical, hip-hop, Krautrock and avant-garde undertows.

Perhaps the first two albums of their 25 – and possibly 2000's *Balls* and 2009's musical *The Seduction Of Ingmar Bergman* – are not superlative, although many a Sparks maven would disagree, but the quality of their output has remained remarkably unwavering. The hits we know, but Sparks have always been an albums act.

Ron is a name-dropper, from Veronica Lake ("That peek-a-boo-y hair/It's a big mistake") and Igor Stravinsky ("Hated minor thirds/Thought them too absurd") to Madonna ("I said 'can I see you again?'/She said 'no'."), and Morrissey on Lighten Up Morrissey: "She won't dine out with me/Says my T-bone steak is at fault/She won't dine out with a murderer, pass the salt."

The wit is both laugh-out-loud and subtle, but there's pathos to spare, hence swathes of their audience weeping when All That closed this summer's concerts. There's heart-on-the-table romance ("I never feel like garbage when I'm with you"); there's sex ("I've still not recovered from Saturday's faux pas, when your father came home, saw us and dropped dead"); and there's understandable bitterness when Here In Heaven's deceased narrator reflects upon a suicide pact which wasn't. Invariably, it's all set against earworm backdrops, ranging from impossibly lush to fiercely spartan.

How to buy Sparks? The bad news: it's tricky. The good news: it's almost impossible to go wrong.

> "The hits we know, but Sparks have always been an albums act."

Camille Walsh

CAST YOUR VOTES...

This month you chose your Top 10 Sparks LPs. Next month we want your Necks Top 10. Send selections via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy The Necks' and we'll print the best comments.

SPARKS
BIG BEAT

10 Sparks
Big Beat

ISLAND, 1976

You say: "Every single song is pure gold." Margarita From Siberia, @margaritamalfoy, via X

After their three-year London sojourn produced three commercially successful UK albums, the Maels dumped their British band and returned home, or at least as far as New York, to make their most direct, most overtly rock album, *Big Beat*. And how they rocked. Fresh from Rolling Thunder, Mick Ronson played on early demos, but he couldn't commit, so Tuff Darts' Jeff Salen drenched *Big Beat* in guitar and Ron switched to grand piano. Nothing To Do soars heroically; the sucker of I Bought The Mississippi River ("Of course that doesn't include the towns or the people") is immediately rueful, and while White Women dripped with irony, perhaps wisely it's not been part of the live set since 1976.

LIL' BEETHOVEN

An Album By
SPARKS

4 Sparks
Lil' Beethoven

LIL' BEETHOVEN, 2002

You say: "Classical meets hip-hop that's quickly tattooed on your brain. Russell is a one-man choir! Ron is a one-man orchestra!" Bevvie-chan @theswansign, via X

After the rare misstep of *Balls*, Sparks retreated from dance ("Say goodbye to the beat," trilled The Rhythm Thief) to embrace pounding piano, classical-style orchestrations and the power and beauty of Philip Glass-style repetition. That repetition reached its zenith on the mesmerising My Baby's Taking Me Home ("about my baby taking me home," explained Ron, helpfully) where the title was endlessly repeated around a brief spoken interlude. Elsewhere, What Are All These Bands So Angry About? and the catchy Suburban Homeboy were biting yet kind satire. It didn't break the commercial drought, but it paved the way for the renaissance.

9 Sparks
No. 1 In Heaven

VIRGIN, 1979

You say: "Synth greatness and equally great lyrics. There are albums that lift my spirits: this is one." Sky @The-Moon-Thief, via X

In 1978, the Maels told a German journalist that Giorgio Moroder was their new producer. Not to put too fine a point on it, they were lying. Not least because the writer was a friend of Moroder's. She generously played cupid and one of the great musical turnarounds began. Russell's voice was drenched in a synth tsunami, but Ron's songs still thrived. The near title track and Beat The Clock were hits, while Tryouts For The Human Race was written from a sperm's point of view… A second fib: according to the credits, *No. 1 In Heaven* was recorded in Moroder's Munich studio. In fact, the European-sounding magic was made in Los Angeles.

8 Sparks
The Girl Is Crying In Her Latte

ISLAND, 2023

You say: "Harmoniously combines songs with a specific story with those on more general topics. The real Sparks world!" Eddie The Frog @eddiehorovitz, via X

If re-signing to Island after almost half a century suggested the Sparks circle was complete, their 25th album showed otherwise. It was partly a distillation of what had gone before, so the title track showcased *Lil' Beethoven*-style repetition and Nothing Is As Good As They Say It Is harkened back to the first Island phase. But it was another step forwards: faux brass on the stomping The Mona Lisa's Packing, Leaving Late Tonight; the rue of the dumped partner on Gee, That Was Fun; and the all-out symphonic clatter of It Doesn't Have To Be That Way. They're as shockingly good in 2023 as they were in 1974.

Introducing Sparks

7 Sparks
Introducing Sparks

CBS, 1977

You say: "Wildly underrated. They'd simply found another style they were masters of." Suzanne Thomas, via e-mail

Their first album recorded in California since *A Woofer In Tweeter's Clothing* was a commercial and critical flop, but its reputation has waxed over the decades. Relatively slick on the surface and played by a crack team of sessioneers – just the two members of Toto – *Introducing…* introduced another Sparks. But it turned out they were great at this too and the fabulous songs were consistently lambent, from the hubristic Forever Young (the lyrical opposite to Bob Dylan's Forever Young), to Goofing Off, which makes hedonism seem desperately sad, via Over The Summer, a Beach Boys pastiche where the girl gets sunburnt and Those Mysteries, which asks the pertinent question, "why are there nuns?"

SPARKS
HELLO YOUNG LOVERS

6 Sparks
Hello Young Lovers

GUT, 2006

You say: "Strange, sweet and sinister operatic/theatrical pop that swings, while remaining grounded in real human experience." Pang @politeandnotgay, via X

Sparks' highest UK charting LP since *Indiscreet* 31 years previously. Four years after *Lil' Beethoven* re-defined them (again), they recruited Redd Kross's Steven McDonald on intermittent bass to propel a subversive yet unashamedly poppy LP: (Baby Baby) Can I Invade Your Country? included huge (credited) portions of The Star Spangled Banner; the tongue-twisting Dick Around was banned by the BBC; and Waterproof was a waltz before the rapping section. There's No Such Thing As Aliens contradicted their own A Fun Bunch Of Guys From Outer Space, and the seven minutes of As I Sit Down To Play The Organ At The Notre Dame Cathedral were heroically deranged.

5 Sparks
Propaganda

ISLAND, 1974

You say: "Does a better job than *Kimono My House* of showcasing their talents; has glammy flair, but with the '80s LPs' lyrical wit." Goodbye Charlemagne @KevinFroleiks, via X

Having swapped a rented flat in Beckenham for the basement of esteemed writer Kenneth Tynan's South Kensington house, the Maels were Londoners now. Sparks' last UK Top 10 entry for 43 years appeared just six months after *Kimono My House*. Unashamedly rocky, it was packed with irresistible choruses, and there were hits (Something For The Girl With Everything and Never Turn Your Back On Mother Earth). But this was Sparks, so there's "when a potentate ain't so potent in his state", there's Achoo collapsing in a fusillade of sneezing, and there's Bon Voyage, narrated by one left behind by Noah's Ark.

3 Sparks
Music That You Can Dance To

MCA/CURB, 1986

You say: "What an LP. The bridge to the '90s and beyond." Terry McPhail, via e-mail

The mid-'80s were tough for Sparks, but as their under-rated 14th album proved, it wasn't for the want of trying. Part intense dance, part jaggedly experimental, the British edition was sabotaged by the unfathomable omission of the despondent Change (often cited by Ron as his favourite Sparks song), while their long-standing band was mostly superfluous and wouldn't be used again. But with its radical, harmonica-free cover of Stevie Wonder's Fingertips and the sublime title track, their second LP recorded in Belgium was their most European since Moroder. And Rosebud, with its curious evocation of Talking Heads' Life During Wartime, is perhaps the great lost Sparks song. Full-scale rehabilitation beckons.

2 Sparks
Kimono My House

ISLAND, 1974

You say: "A 1974 Christmas present which became my favourite album by anyone." DarkLonelyWater @darklonelywater, via X

If UK Number 2 hit This Town Ain't Big Enough For Both Of Us on Top Of The Pops was many people's entry point to Sparks, its parent album *Kimono My House* showed they were no one-song wonders. It still sizzles. After two false starts (1971's *Halfnelson* and '73's *A Woofer In Tweeter's Clothing*) they found their feet on this third album as the barnstorming choruses and deft lyrics ("It's a lot like playing the violin/ You cannot start off and be Yehudi Menuhin" noted Ron, of sex) eased into place. And there was Equator, ostensibly the tale of a missed date, delivered by beyond-falsetto Russell as if it were the end of the world. They don't make them like this any more. They didn't make them like this then.

GRATUITOUS SAX & SENSELESS VIOLINS
SPARKS
ALL NEW ALBUM
EXCLUSIVE! "Room service" cover up! It was hot but it wasn't on the menu!
The moustache, the crooner, and the Brazilian Bombshell
THOSE BARE SCENES THEY TRIED TO SUPPRESS!
The smear CAMPAIGN that ran afoul
America's most miserable man

1 Sparks
Gratuitous Sax & Senseless Violins

LOGIC, 1994

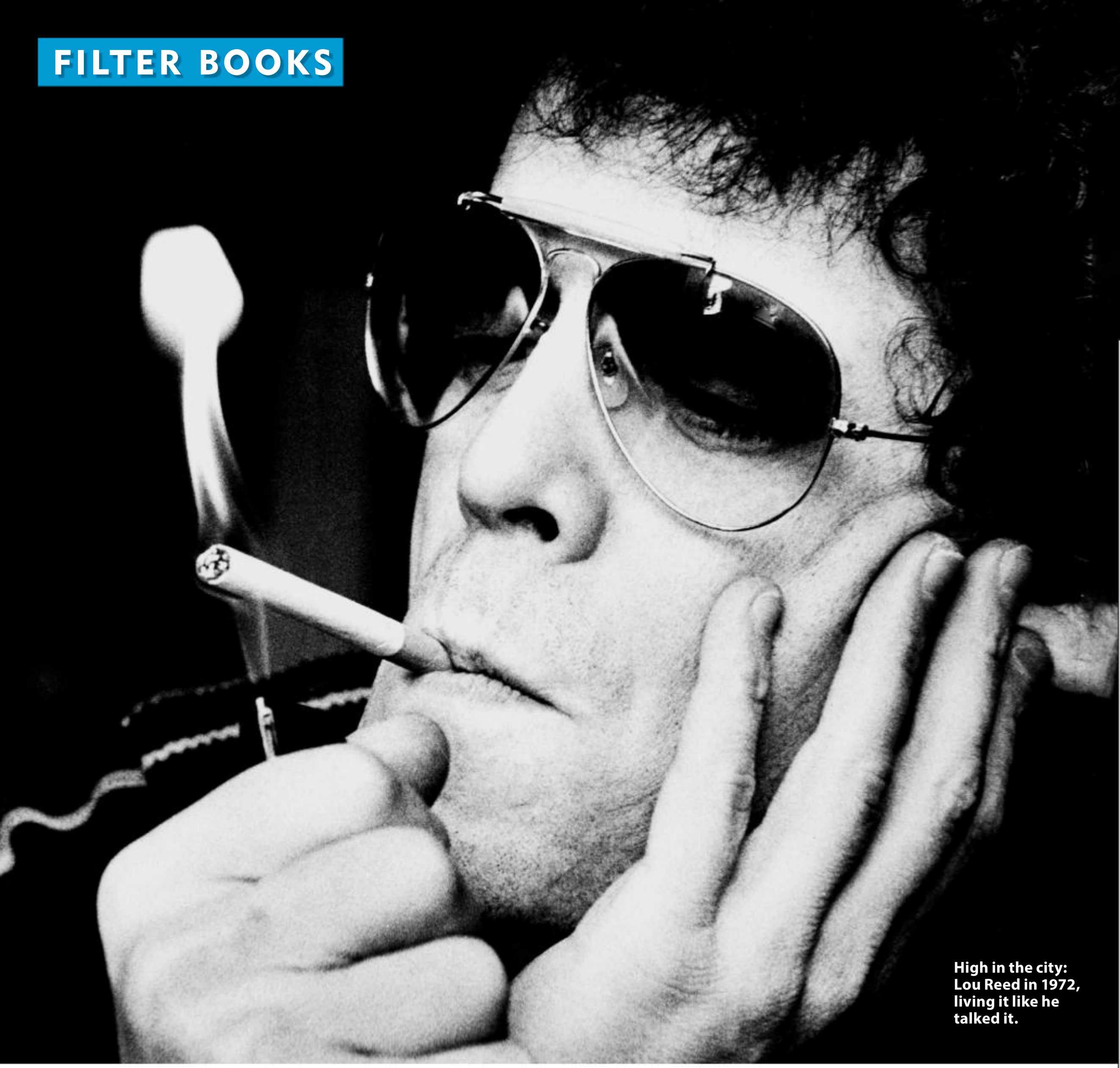
You say: "Peak Sparks. It felt like this is what they were trying to say all along. Still does." Elaine Danson, via e-mail

Six weary years of failed projects (the Mai, The Psychic Girl movie; a clutch of unreleased songs such as She's Beautiful (So What?)) and the building of their studio at Russell's house (previously used by Arthur 'Harpo' Marx for rendezvous with his mistress) followed *Interior Design*. Then, this. Not for the first or last time, Sparks came back stronger, combining the Moroder years' synth swirl – signed to the German label Logic, they finally achieved real success in the land where Moroder made his name – with thumping hooks and Russell's ever-evolving voice. Lyrically, they drew from their struggles, hence the frustration ("is my smiley face still on?") of When Do I Get To Sing "My Way", the emotional heft of The Ghost Of Liberace and of Let's Go Surfing, while (When I Kiss You) I Hear Charlie Parker Playing lives up to its title. Astonishing.

NOW DIG THIS

THE SPARKS BROTHERS
A FILM BY
EDGAR WRIGHT

The 2013 box set *New Music For Amnesiacs: The Ultimate Collection*, showcased all the LPs, but it was short on rarities and accompanying detail. The Maels' abhorrence of personal and relationship revelation hampered biographies by Dave Thompson (No. 1 Songs In Heaven, 2009), Daryl Easlea (Talent Is An Asset, 2010) and Laura Shenton's unnecessarily specific Sparks 1974 (2020). But without filling in all the gaps, the brothers partly opened up for Edgar Wright's wonderful film biography The Sparks Brothers. They wrote and produced an all-new soundtrack to Leos Carax's 2021 Annette film, and while Sparks rarely collaborate, the three songs they shared with Les Rita Mitsouko in 1988 were a joy, and *FFS*, the pooling of resources with Franz Ferdinand, a delight.



High in the city: Lou Reed in 1972, living it like he talked it.

Gijsbert Hanekroot/Alamy

Light and heat

Built around access to Reed's personal archives, a sympathetic portrait of a vastly talented but difficult man. By **Jon Savage.**

Lou Reed: The King Of New York

★★★★

Will Hermes

VIKING BOOKS. **£25**

WITH SHELVES of books on The Velvet Underground and Lou Reed, is there anything new to say? This sharp, tight, well-structured biography delivers a convincing affirmative, not least because Will Hermes has had access to Lou Reed's personal archives, deposited in the New York Public Library after his death. These illumine the difficult years after 1979 – when Reed cleaned up his act – and deliver delightful details like John Cale's note to Reed with a copy of What's Welsh For Zen, hoping that the book will prompt, "at the very least, a distant smile of amusement. After all, it really was the most outrageous fun, wasn't it?"

As you'd expect from the title, the book is particularly good on Reed's fascination with his adopted metropolis, Manhattan. This began in his teens when, taking his cues from outsider writers like Hubert Selby and John Rechy, he began to tour the city's underworlds. This preoccupation with the monstrous city would persist throughout his life, not just in *The Velvet Underground And Nico*, but in albums like *Transformer*, *Street Hassle*, *New York* and even one of his final releases, the ambient *Hudson River Wind Meditations*.

As part of this, Hermes explores Reed's ambivalent sexuality. Homosexuality was part of his, and Warhol's shock armoury in The Velvet Underground, but it had roots in both their lives. Reed's continuing willingness to explore this facet of human nature led to groundbreaking works that explored gay, bisexual and non-binary culture, most notably in the signature songs Candy Says and Street Hassle, as well as living it like he talked it: his partner in the mid '70s was the transgender Rachel Humphreys, unforgivably insulted by Lester Bangs.

The book is thorough. Gaps are filled in and expanded: Reed's relationship with Warhol, the poet Delmore Schwartz, and his VU bandmates, the immediate post-VU period, and his poor health for the last 20 years of his life. There are some revelations, most notably from the fan communications in the archive: Hermes records that they "surveyed a deep valley of human suffering. Yet much of the fan mail was heartening, sharing intimacies with an artist whose songs, by laying bare feelings and circumstances normally hidden, compelled them to share their own."

Lou Reed was a box of tricks: sensitive and vicious, controlling, and empathetic, for much of his life at war with the world and with himself. Hermes captures these multiphrenic identities in a sympathetic portrait of a vastly talented but difficult and angry man who achieved his aim: "to take rock'n'roll, the pop format, and make it for adults". As he told the New York Times, "Obsession and guilt are reasons people write in the first place. They are big continents to explore." Reed turned his negatives into positives with epigrammatic lyrics that stick to the soul.

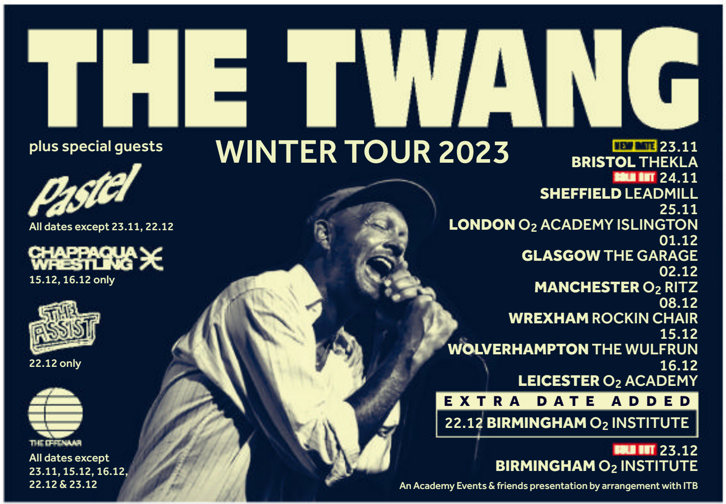
> "Obsession and guilt are reasons people write in the first place."
>
> LOU REED

WILL HERMES
LOU REED

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- One of Reed's favourite records as a teen was Lonely Woman by Ornette Coleman.
- According to Sterling Morrison, when they met at Syracuse, the first song they played together was Ike & Tina Turner's It's Gonna Work Out Fine.
- When the VU played at the Dom, celebrities like Jackie Kennedy, Salvador Dalí, Allen Ginsberg, Sammy Davis Jr and Walter Cronkite turned up.
- Reed made a tape of several VU songs in December 1974: She's My Best Friend, Some Kinda Love, Candy Says and I'm Stickin' With You, in what the author calls "a mid-'70s West Coast singer-songwriter style".

Academy Events present



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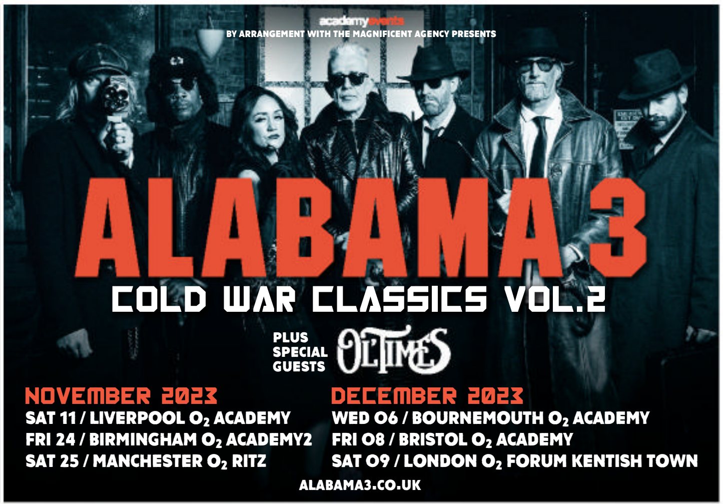

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FRI 08 / BRISTOL O$_2$ ACADEMY
SAT 09 / LONDON O$_2$ FORUM KENTISH TOWN

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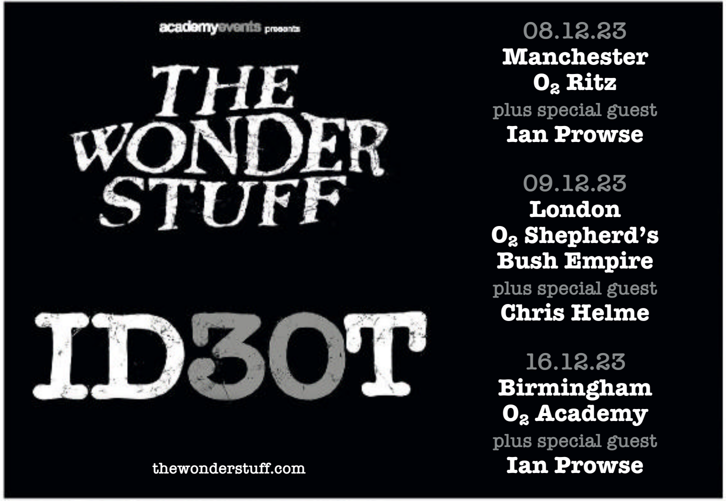

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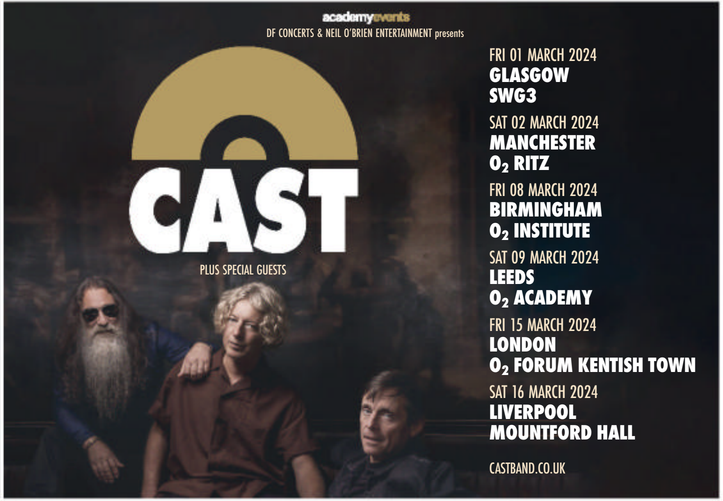

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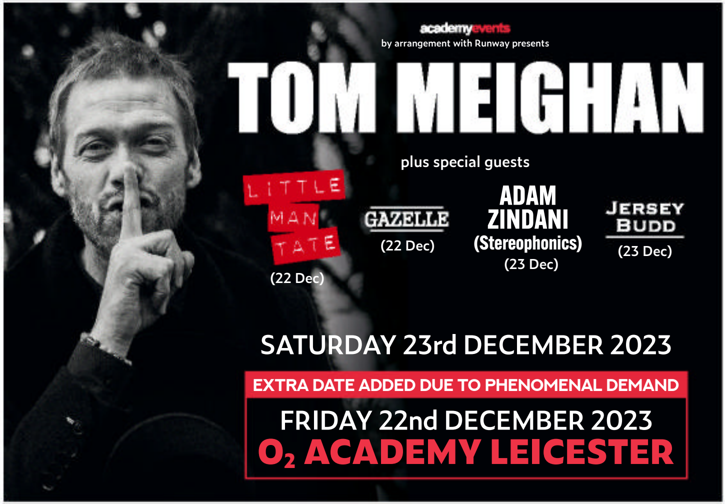

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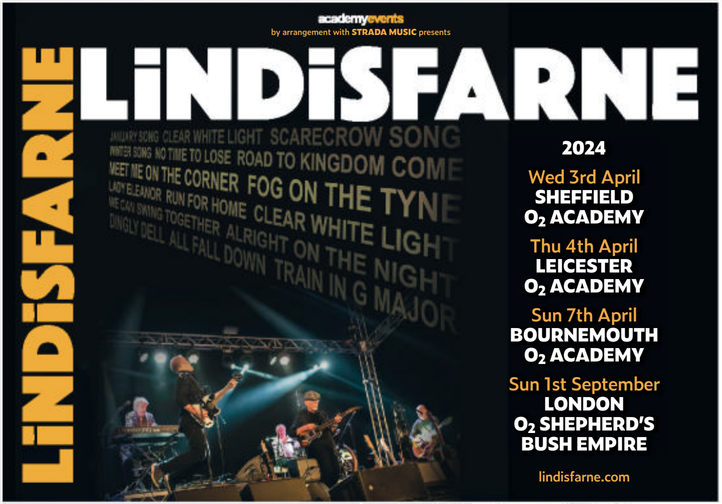
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JANUARY SONG CLEAR WHITE LIGHT SCARECROW SONG
WINTER SONG NO TIME TO LOSE ROAD TO KINGDOM COME
MEET ME ON THE CORNER FOG ON THE TYNE
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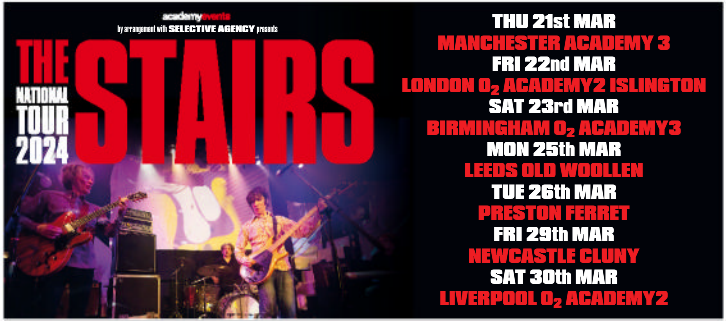

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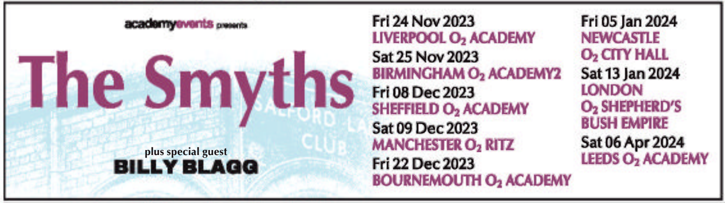
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NEWCASTLE
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LONDON
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BUSH EMPIRE
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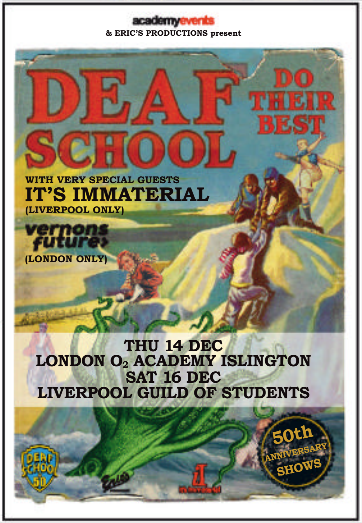
LEEDS O$_2$ ACADEMY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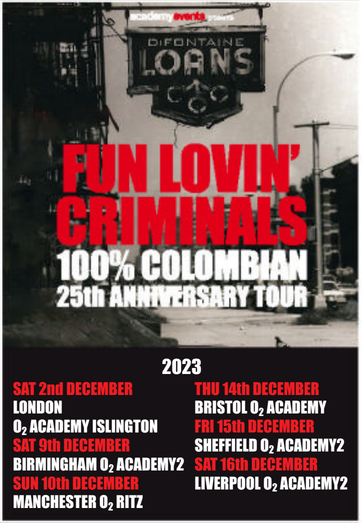
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Jean-Jacques Burnel: Strangler In The Light

★★★★

Anthony Boile

COURSEGOOD. £22

Fascinating in-conversation memoir from the iconic punk bad-boy and latter-day Shidokan master.

While his Stranglers foil Hugh Cornwell has told his story in book form twice, JJ Burnel has kept his powder dry – until now. Constructed thematically from lockdown conversations with Anthony Boile (from the French Ministry Of Culture no less), it's a truly revelatory tome, gifting fans with an unmediated view into the complex thought processes of a man whose punk-era reputation for confrontation – physical and intellectual – still defines him. Those attributes began early – a 'made' teenage Hells Angel, his sole pre-Stranglers ambition was to visit Japan to further his martial arts training – his natural belligerence explained here by deep-rooted confusion over his Anglo-French identity and a tough father. Insights into The Stranglers' inner-workings and musical originality are plentiful, as are discussions about punk punch-ups, why he didn't sue over a famous "Nazi homosexual thug" libel, the myth of Stranglers misogyny, and the travails of the first post-Hugh line-up.

Pat Gilbert

World Within A Song: Music That Changed My Life And Life That Changed My Music

★★★★

Jeff Tweedy

FABER. £12.99

From Free Bird to Radio Free Europe, the Wilco leader reminds us what songs can mean.

Just two paragraphs into his third book, Jeff Tweedy admits that this one – a digest of essays about 50 songs that helped shape his worldview, interspersed with playful anecdotes about gambling and goofs – would have been his first, had he any confidence as a writer. But after a memoir and a self-effacing guide to shaping songs, Tweedy has found and finessed a conversational tone that makes each entry here feel like a spirited chat over a third cup of coffee. Where Dylan's The Philosophy Of Modern Song was built on chin-scratches and winks, Tweedy's answer overruns with belly laughs and the occasional misty eye. He eschews high-brow insights ("I'm an inspired amateur," he says of John Cage's 4'33") for snapshots of how masterpieces and baubles alike – The Weight to Wanted Dead Or Alive, Both Sides Now to Happy Birthday – score our memories and alter psyches. Relatability, backed by grace and humour, abounds.

Grayson Haver Currin

High Bias: The Distorted History Of The Cassette Tape

★★★★

Marc Masters

UNC. £15

Music's most overlooked format gets the celebration it deserves.

The renaissance of the audio cassette – a relic possessing little of vinyl's fetishistic magic – might seem baffling, but Marc Masters' energetic, expert tome unspools a compelling argument. Following an authoritative overview of the format's genesis, Masters explores the many lives the humble cassette has lived as conduit for demos, heartfelt mixtapes, illicit live bootlegs and even more illicit piracy. "The cassette tape has always been dangerous," Masters writes; that it's also played a crucial role in music history is a key element here. Masters' narrative encompasses devoted tapers chronicling the Dead's entire concert existence, Springsteen scrapping his studio version of *Nebraska* for the spook of his 4-track demos, DC's go-go scene thriving off soundboard-sourced live tapes, and "vulgar" local music in Egypt flourishing in the face of government oppression via this most egalitarian format. You'll end up craving to dub a mixtape.

Stevie Chick

The Double Life Of Bob Dylan Vol. 2 1966-2021: Far Away From Myself

★★

Clinton Heylin

BODLEY HEAD. £35

The best Dylan biography yet. Also the worst.

Never mind Dylan's double life, there are two sides to self-styled "Somerset-based 'world's leading authority'" Clinton Heylin. There is the forensically diligent researcher and archaeologist of Dylan's creative processes, granted early access to the official archive. Then there is the excruciating wannabe hipster who blends the most tortured literary overreach with judgements so pompous that one recoils even when they're right. If you can get past such crimes against the English language and common decency as "he gerrymandered an edifice", "duskier dame" and "Jap", there's much to treasure in this second volume. First, the deep dig into the writing, recording and performing – a generally dry read but invaluable reference. Second, the life where much is revealed but also much under-explored. Aside from the drinking, how might the cocaine, even the crystal meth to which he treated himself on his 52nd birthday, have coloured Dylan's creativity and decision-making? For once, Heylin has little to say.

Mat Snow

My Effin' Life

★★★★

Geddy Lee

HARPER COLLINS. £30

The Rush frontman's epic and candid memoir.

On paper, Geddy Lee's Big Beautiful Book Of Bass looked decidedly niche, but Rush's avid fanbase ensured Lee's pricey 2018 coffee-table book about four-strings sold loads. Unsurprising, then, that his publisher soon pressed him for this deeply moving human-interest story. Chapters on the abominable wartime experiences of Lee's Holocaust survivor parents and his bandmate Neil Peart's tragic death from brain cancer sometimes make My Effin' Life a troubling read, but they also distinguish the book, giving it power and gravitas, and steering it far from rock memoir cliché. Thankfully, there are plenty of jokes too ("You'll be unsurprised to learn that I was a soprano," Lee says of his school-choir days), and Rush's goofball sensibilities, singular vision and integrity are laid bare. Ultimately, My Effin' Life shows how the trauma of Lee's family history defined and galvanised him, and how his bond with his bandmates sustained him.

James McNair

Paused In Cosmic Reflection

★★★★

The Chemical Brothers

WHITE RABBIT. £30

Beautifully presented Chems oral history collated by Heavenly's Robin Turner

You'd think that after shifting 15 million albums across three decades, there'd be a book about them already, but here's the A-Z of how Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons went from two geeky ravers at Manchester University to one of dance culture's world-beating attractions. Early on, DJ Justin Robertson authoritatively nails their magic as "a perfect combination of Tom's sonic wizardry and vision, and Ed's rigorous good taste… where hip-hop beats met acid house", and there's ample deep referencing of that formula's genesis. Spicing things up: an abundance of yarns, from one of their crowd "setting himself alight with amyl nitrate" on a dancefloor, through to New Order's Bernard Sumner confusedly urinating in a hotel corridor post-Out Of Control sessions. As with 2011's brilliant Don't Think movie, the visual presentation is exceptional, as photoshoot outtakes, video stills, ecstatic snapshots and assorted ephemera sumptuously encapsulate the Chemicals' mind-altering universe.

Andrew Perry

Whatever Happened To Slade: When The Whole World Went Crazee

★★★★

Daryl Easlea

OMNIBUS. £25

The band that's not just for Christmas.

After autobiographies by all four members and numerous other books over the decades, there is not much of the Slade story that remains untold. For author and MOJO contributor Daryl Easlea (who's also written biographies of Chic, Peter Gabriel and Sparks) this is a true labour of love, however, as Slade were his first, the band he discovered on his own as they rose screaming to unparalleled success. From grotty working men's clubs as bovver-booted skins to a four-year period with barely a week when the Top 40 singles and album charts didn't contain a Slade entry, and all the way back to those grotty clubs before rightful recognition as national treasures, just like their 1975 film Slade In Flame it's the story of pretty much every band. But no one did it with the earthiness, humour, and pathos of Slade.

Andy Fyfe

No bovver: the flaming brilliant Slade.

Gijsbert Hanekroot

Celebrate your lives: Rudolph 'Rudy' Isley

Getty

Amen, Brother

Cane-carrying family band singer Rudolph Isley left us on October 11.

POP MUSIC would sound very different if The Isley Brothers hadn't happened, if only because of their significant impact upon The Beatles, Hendrix, Sly Stone and others, never mind their run of high-calibre hits for Motown in the '60s and their own T-Neck imprint in the '70s and '80s.

When the fiercely exciting vocal trio of Ronald (Ronnie), Rudolph (Rudy) and O'Kelly (Kelly) Isley were joined by a rhythm section comprising younger brothers Ernie and Marvin and Rudy's brother-in-law Chris Jasper – initially in the background, then officially part of the act from the superb *3+3* onwards – they became a formidable, boundary-breaking family unit, fusing R&B grooves with rock's expansiveness, taking songs by Neil Young, Carole King, Seals & Croft and Todd Rundgren to new places while also crafting their own classics, including Work To Do, That Lady, Fight The Power and Harvest For The World, laying a track that has run right through pop's history. No other act spanned doo wop, gospel, rock'n'roll, Motown, R&B, electro and hip-hop and had hits in each style.

Second-born brother Rudolph came into the world on April 1, 1939, in Cincinnati. Parents O'Kelly Snr and Sallye were college graduates who gave a complete musical education to their children. "They exposed us to everything, classical music, country, standards, show tunes," recalled Ronnie to MOJO in 2001. Unfortunately, O'Kelly Snr passed away before his singing sons found fame, as he had curiously predicted he would. The older Isley boys became the providers and de facto daddies, and in 1959 the churchy blast of their fourth single Shout was successful enough to buy a new family home in Teaneck, New Jersey. Rudolph was, said youngest brother Marvin, the strict disciplinarian. Aged 19, Rudy married childhood sweetheart Elaine Jasper. On tour, he packed a gun and collected the takings. According to one associate, eldest brother Kelly steered the ship, Ronnie was creative director and Rudy was "head of security".

> "Rudolph was, said youngest brother Marvin, the strict disciplinarian."

THE LEGACY

The Album: *3+3* (Epic, 1973)

The Sound: T-Neck albums *Brother, Brother, Brother* and *Givin' It Back* were excellent shots at marrying R&B and rock, but they hit the bullseye on their all-killer debut as a funk-rock family band, reviving early highlight That Lady, conjuring definitive covers of Seals & Croft's Summer Breeze and Stephen Stills's Listen To The Music, and self-penned evergreens The Highways Of My Life and Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight.

Backing Ronnie's incredible voice, Kelly and Rudy kept the energy up. Rudy hit the high note in Shout. Sounding like a lighter version of Ronnie, he would take occasional leads, as on 1969's I Got To Get Myself Together or 1979's It's A Disco Night. The deep bond between Rudy and Kelly meant his world was rocked when Kelly died suddenly of a heart attack in 1986, shortly after their debut album for Warner Brothers, *Masterpiece*. After two more albums, Rudy decided in 1989 that he'd had enough, left the band and followed his wife into the ministry in Oklahoma. They cut a gospel album together in 1996, *Shouting For Jesus*.

In 2004, Rudy joined his brothers on-stage to accept a BET Lifetime Achievement Award. Earlier this year he initiated legal action claiming co-ownership of the Isley Brothers name and his right to earnings postdating his leaving the band. The case had not come to court when he died, aged 84. He is survived by Ronnie, Ernie, his wife Elaine and four children.

Jim Irvin

Hip-hop royalty: Mark Howard James, The 45 King.

Carla Bley

Free jazz grande dame

BORN 1936

CARLA BLEY captured the spirit of the age with 1971's triple LP *Escalator Over The Hill*. Written alongside librettist Paul Haines, Bley cajoled an exceptional cast of jazzers (Don Cherry, Gato Barbieri, John McLaughlin) and rockers (Linda Ronstadt, Paul Jones, Jack Bruce) to complete her operatic concept piece about a dilapidated fictional hotel. It won France's prestigious Grand Prix du Disque and was hailed as jazz's answer to *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Before its release, Bley had struggled to find her place. A doggedly inventive composer, with an instantly recognisable hairdo, she was born Lovella May Borg to evangelical Swedish parents in California, and initially tutored by her piano teacher father. The rebellious teen escaped her religious origins and taught herself jazz after discovering Lionel Hampton, Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker, hitching to New York to become a cigarette girl at Broadway jazz club Birdland. It was there she met (and later married) virtuoso pianist Paul Bley, who encouraged her writing, and founded the experimentally-driven, non-profit Jazz Composer's Guild.

A big band composer in the harmonically bold Ellington tradition, Bley penned vibraphonist Gary Burton's intriguing *A Genuine Tong Funeral* (1968) and bassist Charlie Haden's leader debut *Liberation Music Orchestra* (1970), notching a trail of standards such as Lawns, Ida Lupino, King Korn and Vashkar along the way. She also wrote *Nick Mason's Fictitious Sports* (1981) for the Pink Floyd drummer and helped super-producer Hal Willner realise his ornate '80s tributes to Nino Rota, Thelonious Monk and Kurt Weill.

Although Bley always insisted she would rather write than play, her later open-ended albums for ECM alongside husband Steve Swallow (bass) and Andy Sheppard (sax) doubled down on her spirited style. Her compositional wit was particularly undimmed on Copycat, a melodic kiss-chase from 2020's final album *Life Goes On*. She died in New York from complications from brain cancer.

Andy Cowan

Carla Bley: a doggedly inventive jazz composer and bandleader.

Getty (4)

Angelo Bruschini

Massive guitarist

BORN c1960

ALERTED TO the exciting potentials of the guitar by watching Slade's Dave Hill, Angelo Bruschini later played with Bristol bands including The Numbers, Rimshots and The Sidneys. He came to wider notice as part of The Blue Aeroplanes, initially appearing on 1985's *Tolerance* and present in earnest for the celebrated *Swagger* (1990) and *Beatsongs* (1991). He first played with Massive Attack, uncredited, on 1994's *Protection*, later joining their live band (at, he recalled, three days' notice). Bruschini was fully present on 1998's *Mezzanine*, bringing an appreciable human grit and imperfection with his guitar tones and textures. He remained a member of the group, and also returned to The Blue Aeroplanes; his other credits included Alpha, Alison Moyet, The Mighty Lemon Drops and, more recently, Saint Mars. In July, he announced with remarkable candour that his lung cancer was terminal, concluding: "Had a great life, seen the world many, many times, met lots of wonderful people, but the door is closing."

Ian Harrison

Gregg Sutton

Storied bassist

BORN 1949

FROM NEW York, Gregg Sutton was a friend and musical director to Andy Kaufman, working on the comedian's celebrated 1979 Carnegie Hall performance when he took the entire audience out for milk and cookies after the show. Earlier in the '70s Sutton played alongside Carmine Appice and Barry Goldberg in blues rock supergroup KGB and later became a member of Bob Dylan's band, alongside Mick Taylor and Ian McLagan, appearing on 1984's *Real Live* album. He joined Lone Justice in 1986, and worked on Maria McKee's solo debut in 1989. He also found success as a songwriter, his hit co-compositions including Sam Brown's Stop! and Curtis Stigers' You're All That Matters To Me; other of his songs were sung by Percy Sledge, Dolly Parton and Joe Cocker. Sutton also recorded the 1979 solo LP *Soft As A Sidewalk*, was a member of The Pets, and played himself in 1999 Kaufman biopic Man On The Moon.

Clive Prior

> **"Gregg Sutton played himself in 1999 Andy Kaufman biopic Man On The Moon."**

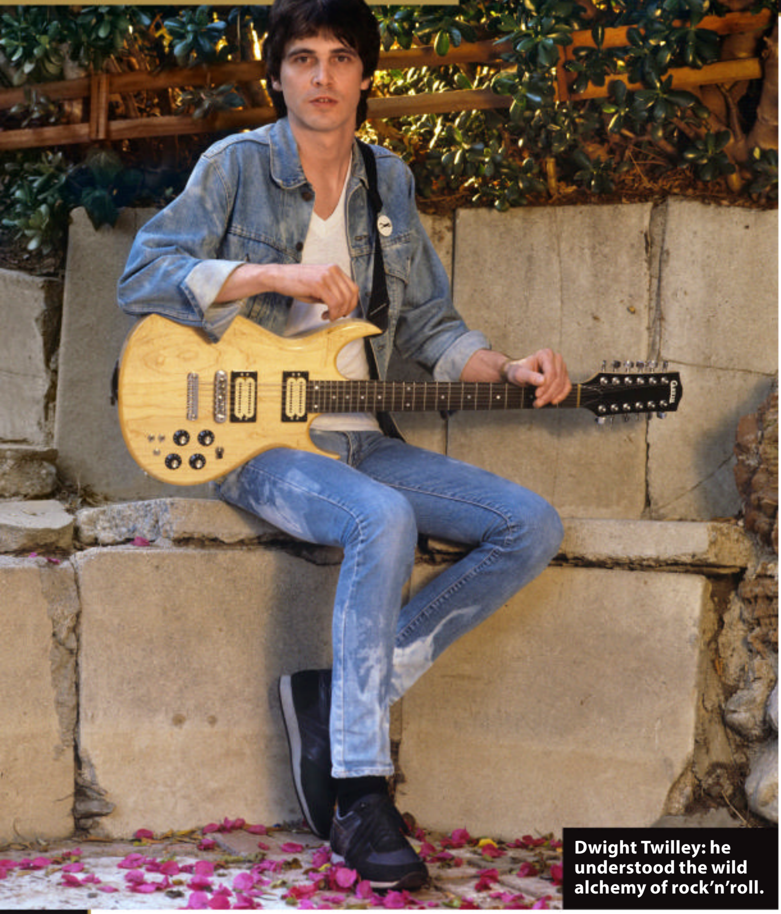
The 45 King

Supreme hip-hop sampler

BORN 1961

NAMED AFTER his talent for spinning memorable samples from obscure singles, Bronx-born producer Mark Howard James had instant lift-off when he appended Marvin Whitney's sax riff from Unwind Yourself to soon-to-be-trademark heavy drums for 1987's The 900 Number. A ubiquitous underground smash, he followed it by scoring Queen Latifah's first hits and bringing through members of his Flavor Unit crew. Early fame came with its downsides, including drug issues, though King rebuilt his career under the radar across a stream of breakbeat releases and remixes, notably for Madonna and C+C Music Factory. He reaffirmed his talents as the '90s closed: a pitched-up sample from stage musical Annie supplied Jay-Z's breakthrough hit Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem), while a melancholic twist on Dido's Thank You was an ideal fit for Stan, Eminem's forensic takedown of extreme fandom, in 2000. He continued to produce, his most recent releases being the two-volume *Back To The Beat* collections.

Andy Cowan



Dwight Twilley: he understood the wild alchemy of rock'n'roll.

Dwight Twilley

Powerpop royalty

BORN 1951

"EVERYONE PLAYS to old people with beards," declared Dwight Twilley to ZigZag's Kris Needs in 1977. "We're fed up with the old groups. We're trying to re-establish the young, wild element of rock'n'roll."

As a mission statement it chimed nicely with that year's punk imperative. Singer-songwriter Twilley and his musical partner Phil Seymour had already made good on this tactic in 1975, when the Dwight Twilley Band's debut single I'm On Fire went US Top 20. Not punk, but pointing to new wave, this future powerpop lodestone united rock muscle with a '60s pop sensibility, and comparisons with Big Star were made.

It began when Tulsa, Oklahoma high schoolers Twilley and Seymour met at a 1967 screening of A Hard Day's Night. Their alliance was cemented by a fondness for Elvis, The Beatles, The Beach Boys and The Hollies, and solo voices including Gene Pitney and Lou Christie. The duo had an abortive brush with Nashville's music business in 1969, preceded by a stop off at Sun Studios in Memphis, where Jerry Phillips introduced them to rockabilly singer, producer and Hi Records co-founder Ray Harris. In 1974 they signed, as Oister, to Oklahoma's Shelter Records and changed their band's name.

After I'm On Fire hit, 1976's belated debut *Sincerely* failed to capitalise. Despite a series of strong 45s and appearances live and on record with fellow Shelter signee Tom Petty, there was no more chart action until Twilley's chugging solo single Girls reached US Number 16 in April 1984. It was his final hit.

He continued to make music, with later activities including a 2009 Beatles tribute album, founding the Tulsa recording facility Church Studio and, as one of his outstanding songs put it, always Looking For The Magic. Those similarly in thrall to pop in its purest forms knew that Twilley understood what that alchemy was. "When I think of Tulsa, I think of one of my favourite bands," said Blondie's Clem Burke while playing Oklahoma in 2018, "The Dwight Twilley Band."

Kieron Tyler

THEY ALSO SERVED

INDEPENDENT MUSIC instigator **RICHARD SCOTT** (right, b.1945) entered the music industry as co-manager of reggae band **Third World**. Around 1978, Rough Trade label founder Geoff Travis asked him to set up a mail order operation for the Rough Trade shop, which then morphed into Rough Trade Distribution. In time, Travis confirms, Scott became "architect and instigator" of The Cartel, the independent distribution network launched in 1982 that offered a vital alternative to the major labels, and helped break the likes of **Depeche Mode**, **Cocteau Twins** and **The Smiths**. "We all owe Richard an enormous debt," says Travis, "and none more than myself."

BASSIST **PETE OAKMAN** (b.1943) formed **The Spacemen** skiffle group in 1956 with **Joe Brown**; later, as part of Brown's band **The Bruvvers**, Oakman co-wrote the group's 1962 Number 2 A Picture Of You. From 1963 to 2002, he played with **Lonnie Donegan**'s band, and took part in the star-packed tribute to Donegan at the Royal Albert Hall in 2004. He also played with **Country Fever**, **Brown's Home Brew**, **Harley Quinne and The Swinging Blue Jeans**, and worked as PR to actor Peter Ustinov.

DRUMMER **RUSSELL BATISTE JR.** (b.1965) followed in the footsteps of his father, Meters' drummer David Batiste Sr, from a young age, and played with New Orleans bands including **The Funky Meters**, **Papa Grows Funk** and **Vida Blue**. His own groups included the **Batiste Brothers Band** and **Russell Batiste & Friends**; he also worked with **Robbie Robertson**, **Maceo Parker**, **Champion Jack Dupree** and **Harry Connick Jr**, among others.

KEYBOARDIST **MICHAEL 'IBO' COOPER** (below, b.1952) co-founded reggae band **Inner Circle** in 1968, later playing what he claimed was the first Farfisa organ in Jamaica. In 1973 Cooper was among those who left to form **Third World**. Signed to Island, they found their biggest success with a cover of The O'Jays' Now That We Found Love in 1978, with Top 20 singles following in 1979 and 1981. Cooper left the band in 1997; later he worked in education and, in 2005, was awarded Jamaica's Order Of Distinction.

SINGER **RICHARD ROUTLEDGE** (b.1949) was working on Music Echo when he joined Liverpool group **The Cryin' Shames**. Their first single, a cover of Burt Bacharach and Bob Hilliard's Please Stay, was produced by Joe Meek: a Number 26 UK hit in May '66, it was Meek's last chart entry before his 1967 murder-suicide. Routledge later formed the Berlin-based **Blackwater Park** and appeared on **GRIMMS**' 1973 LP *Rockin' Duck*.

NEKTAR DRUMMER **RON HOWDEN** (b.1945) played American army bases in Europe with bassist Derek 'Mo' Moore in **The Upsetters** from 1964. In 1969 they would found Anglos-in-Deutschland prog rockers **Nektar**, with frontman Roye Albrighton, in Hamburg. Earning fans including Joy Division's Ian Curtis, acclaimed albums *Journey To The Centre Of The Eye* (1971) and *A Tab In The Ocean* (1972) followed, with 1973's *Remember The Future* breaking the US Top 20. They split in 1978, but Howden rejoined from 2002, and had played a rehearsal of his own US-based Nektar (another exists in Germany) just days before his death.

ROLLING STONES ASSOCIATE **RONNIE SCHNEIDER** (b.1943) was the nephew of the group's manager Allen Klein. After interning at ABKCO in New York he became the Stones' tour accountant. When the band fired Klein in 1969, Schneider joined their new management team, setting up the Altamont Free Concert and hiring the Maysles brothers to make Gimme Shelter (Schneider appears in several scenes). He also represented his uncle in dealing with The Beatles' Apple Corps. His other production credits include 1968 **Herman's Hermits** film Mrs Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter.

ACTOR **RICHARD ROUNDTREE** (right, b.1942) was a male model before portraying the iconic "black private dick" title role in 1971 action movie Shaft – with its famous **Isaac Hayes** soundtrack – and sequels. He made an LP, *The Man From Shaft*, produced by **Gene McDaniels**, in 1972.

DRUMMER **HUGHIE FRIEL** (b.1952) co-founded Dublin new wave powerpoppers **The Atrix** in 1978. Emerging from the same theatrical cabaret milieu as The Virgin Prunes, their curious debut 45 The Moon Is Puce was produced by Philip Chevron. Signing to Dave Dee's Double D label for 1980's Midge Ure-produced 45 Treasure On The Wasteland, their sole LP, *Procession*, followed in 1981. In 2019 The Atrix re-formed for a one-off show with Friel on lead vocals.

APPLE RECORDS PRESIDENT **JACK OLIVER** (b.1945) was a member of UK group **The Chocolate Watch Band** (not the San Jose outfit) before joining The Beatles' label in 1967, working with publicist Derek Taylor. He was label head from 1969-71. He also managed **Mary Hopkin**, formed a managerial/ production partnership with **Peter Asher**, and produced live performances for the **Eagles**, **Cat Stevens**, **Carole King** and more. From 1994-2001, he was personal advisor to Nicolas Cage.

Jenny Bulley, Martin Aston and Ian Harrison

Adrian Boot/urbanimage.tv, Getty (2)

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Now you has Brit-jazz: (from right) Stan Tracey, Malcolm Cecil, Jackie Dougan and Roland Kirk blow up a storm on-stage; (below) Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, New York, 1950; (below left, from left) sax men Duncan Lamont, Bobby Wellins and Ronnie Scott, Marquee Club, London, 1962.

DECEMBER 1965

Stan Tracey goes Under Milk Wood

DECEMBER 17 Today, Ronnie Scott's jazz club moved to the Frith Street location it still occupies in London's Soho. House trio pianist and leader Stan Tracey, like many others, would refer to its original premises in Gerrard Street as 'The Old Place'. During the festive period of 1965, however, Tracey's sense of location was becoming perilously disorientated.

On the surface, it all looked rosy. The south London-born Tracey had of late backed visiting American jazz heavyweights including Roland Kirk, Freddie Hubbard and Sonny Rollins, who gave him a glowing endorsement to silence those who said British musicians were poor relations who couldn't cut it with the grown-ups: "Does anyone in Britain really know how good he is?"

A man healthily suspicious of such plaudits, Tracey was cautiously gratified. He also had other things on his mind, namely a raging heroin habit acquired after graduating from the weed, uppers and cocaine that went with the round-the-clock jazz life. "It felt good," he said of the drug in 2017 biography The Godfather Of British Jazz, written by his son Clark. "[It] gave me a completely different kind of feeling about the music… a real steamroller feeling." Inevitably, he soon needed to take "horse" just to feel normal, and admitted that it affected his playing. On hearing contemporaneous live recordings, he was merciless, calling them, "a load of crap".

Yet at this critical juncture, his most famous work was released to the world. *Jazz Suite (Inspired By Dylan Thomas's Under Milk Wood)* came into being after Tracey's industrious wife Jackie had secured him a deal to record for the Columbia label's Lansdowne Series earlier in the year. Best known as a 1954 BBC radio "play for voices", Under Milk Wood vividly told of the lives, woes and other predicaments of the inhabitants of the imagined Welsh village of Llareggub. Just five months before his death in Greenwich Village in 1953, the Swansea-born Thomas narrated a "work-in-progress" version of the piece on-stage in New York. Tracey first heard it on a recording of that performance owned by his wife. "I thought, Wahey! That's a lovely hook," he told Clark.

JAZZ SUITE
INSPIRED BY
DYLAN THOMAS'S
UNDER MILK WOOD
THE STAN TRACEY QUARTET

> "I thought, Wahey! That's a lovely hook."
> **STAN TRACEY**

On March 4, 1965, The Stan Tracey Quartet – with Bobby Wellins on tenor sax, Jeff Clyne on bass and Jackie Dougan on drums – went to Lansdowne studios in Holland Park with producer Denis Preston to record. Animated and shifting, with references to the text in titles and tones, the resulting, lyrical LP swings and speaks to higher faculties with ease: the album's most bewitching moment is Starless And Bible Black, where the interior dreams of the villagers are evoked with a hushed profundity. Tracey said it was the tune that took the least trouble to write, and credited Wellins for capturing its unique atmosphere.

Its reception was warm. "This album proves that the local lads can turn in as intriguing a set as the best of them," wrote Bob Houston in the December 4 Melody Maker. "The habit of using works of literature as pegs to hang a string of jazz originals on can be fraught with danger. Tracey, however, has brought it off."

In time it would be recognised as a British

Getty (7), Alamy (1)

jazz landmark, but in the moment Tracey was too busy to take much notice. On New Year's Eve he was playing with Yusef Lateef at the new home of Ronnie Scott's, and soon Mark Murphy and Wes Montgomery would be in need of his services. In October '66 his drug problems came to a head, and he left his residency at Ronnie's. Yet it seemed a cult was forming for …*Under Milk Wood*. In 1966 Tracey and band revisited it live at home and abroad; they did so again in 1968 with trombonist Malcolm Griffiths handling the narration. The piece was revived in 1973, 1978, 1994 and 2005, when Wellins returned for a show at London's Mermaid Theatre where Philip Madoc, Ruth Madoc and Victor Spinetti provided the voices. Tracey also re-recorded it twice, with Donald Houston in 1976 and Philip Madoc in 2001. In 2011, he even created a follow-up of sorts, interpreting Thomas's 1952 piece A Child's Christmas In Wales with his grandson Ben's narration and son Clark on drums.

Through it all he kept on playing and writing, recording his remarkably energised final LP *The Flying Pig* just months before his death on December 6, 2013. He laconically called *Under Milk Wood* his "only success, with a small 's'." "I'm more mystified than proud," the resolutely grounded musician told All About Jazz's John Eyles in 2005. "Mystified by the success it has had… I suppose I was pleased with what I wrote, otherwise I wouldn't have recorded it."

Ian Harrison

With acknowledgements to The Godfather Of British Jazz: The Life And Music Of Stan Tracey by Clark Tracey (Equinox).

Barrel of laughs: PJ Proby almost blows it in 1965.

Proby to be deported?

DECEMBER 16 Infamous for an on-stage trouser splitting incident in Croydon in January '65, PJ Proby's single Maria peaks at UK Number 8. All month the Texan has been saying he was facing deportation to the US after his visa expired; he also said he was broke, that he'd been savagely bitten on the arm by his St Bernard dog Athesius, and, to December 17's NME, "I know you believe I split my pants purposely on those early shows but I know I didn't" (he also bites one of his own dogs for the photographer). He later announces he's had a stay of visa execution until April '66. More scandalous, it's whispered that his luxuriant locks are in fact a wig.

Generation vexed: The Who's (from left) Keith Moon, Pete Townshend, John Entwistle and Roger Daltrey in 1965.

WHO UNLEASH MY GENERATION

DECEMBER 3 Pete Townshend is bad tempered about The Who's debut LP in Record Mirror, calling *My Generation* "rubbish" and their version of James Brown's Please Please Please "the same old crap", and says of I'm A Man, "I hate this" (he calls The Kids Are Alright his favourite song). The same day the band play their last show at regular haunt the Goldhawk Club in Shepherd's Bush, where Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni is in the audience. On December 6 drummer Keith Moon falls ill with whooping cough; Viv Prince, who's just left The Pretty Things, deputises until Moony returns to health. This month Prince also plays with The Honeycombs at the London Palladium, when drummer Honey Lantree steps up to sing on December 5.

ALSO ON!

BREL IN THE USA

4 Jacques Brel (above) makes his US debut at New York's Carnegie Hall. Four days later at the Bitter End, shows commence by Rod McKuen, who is already translating Brel's songs for the Anglophone audience.

BYRDS TURN

4 The Byrds' Turn! Turn! Turn! hits US Number 1. On December 12, they play it on The Ed Sullivan Show; after David Crosby argues with the director, they are not asked back.

THUNDERBALL ON!

21 Bond movie Thunderball gets its US premiere in New York. Originally the theme was to be Shirley Bassey's Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, later re-recorded by Dionne Warwick; it was replaced by a title song by Tom Jones, who fainted after holding its final long note.

MINDBENDING ENDS

23 Wayne Fontana's first solo single It Was Easier To Hurt Her peaks at UK Number 36. In January his old band The Mindbenders hit Number 2 with Groovy Kind Of Love.

DEAD/WARLOCKS PLAY

30 At San Francisco's Fillmore, Jefferson Airplane, The Great Society and others play a benefit for political theatre company the Mime Troupe. The Grateful Dead also appear, though columnist Ralph Gleason refers to them as The Warlocks in a write-up.

TOP TEN

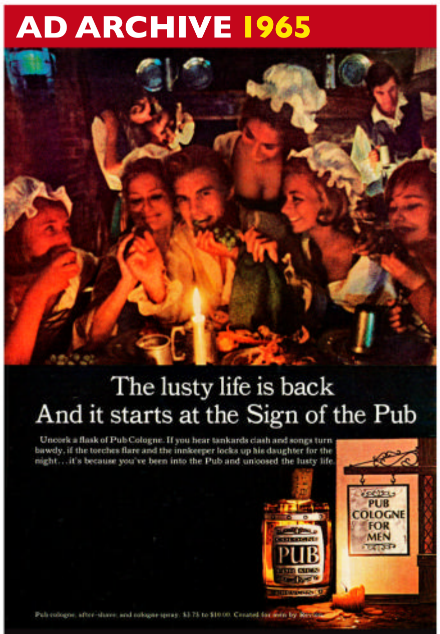
NEW ZEALAND SINGLES DECEMBER 18

1 **TEARS** KEN DODD COLUMBIA
2 **HANG ON SLOOPY** THE McCOYS STATESIDE
3 **LIKE A ROLLING STONE** BOB DYLAN CBS
4 **YOU'VE GOT YOUR TROUBLES** THE FORTUNES DECCA
5 **YESTERDAY** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
6 **LOOK THROUGH ANY WINDOW** THE HOLLIES PARLOPHONE
7 **WAKE UP MY MIND** THE UGLYS PYE
8 **I GOT YOU BABE** SONNY AND CHER ATLANTIC
9 **MAKE IT EASY ON YOURSELF** THE WALKER BROTHERS PHILIPS
10 **YOU WERE ON MY MIND** WE FIVE FESTIVAL

NO ENTRY
Except to authorised persons

On top Down Under: Doddy at Number 1.

AD ARCHIVE 1965



The lusty life is back
And it starts at the Sign of the Pub

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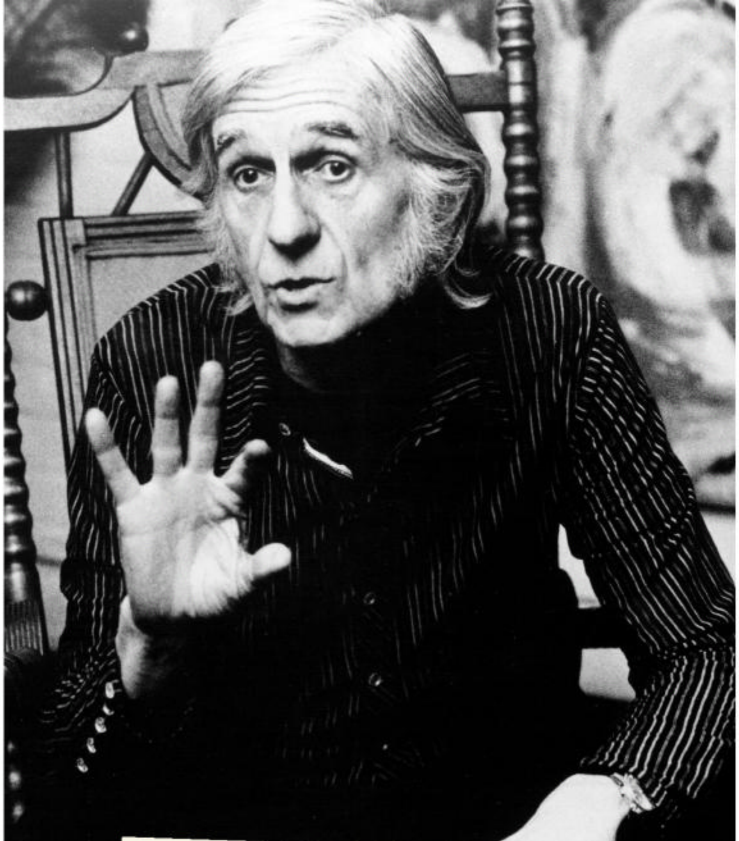


Stages of fear: (clockwise from left) Kate Bush got "really nervous" performing live; "genius" Hot Gossip collaborator Gil Evans; Hot Gossip whip up a synth-pop-jazz storm; Wizzard king Roy Wood.

Who had the stage fright yips?

Let us answer your rock queries and settle music-related disputes.

I was interested to read in the recent MOJO that Mary Hopkin refused to play live. Who else is/was reluctant to appear on-stage due to fright or a dislike of the whole touring process?
Kevin Clarke, via e-mail

MOJO says: Getting the fear before going on-stage is common indeed, with experienced hands admitting to it including Sinatra, Ozzy Osbourne and Robbie Robertson (The Band's *Stage Fright* is a telling anatomising of the condition). One dramatic example was Andy Partridge of XTC, who, withdrawing from Valium, had a breakdown at Le Palace in Paris in 1982, and left the stage after 30 seconds (the event can be witnessed on YouTube). One date of a US tour later and he was through with the road. Other stage-uncomfortable notables include Nick Drake, whose handful of gigs were, reputedly, painfully awkward; Scott Walker, who bowed out after a cabaret residency in Birmingham in 1978; Kate Bush, who left 35 years between performances and spoke of being "really nervous every night" during her 2014 Before The Dawn shows; Brian Wilson, who left The Beach Boys to it after suffering a panic attack in 1964; piano giant Glenn Gould, who quit in 1964 with reference to 'GPAADAK' (or the 'Gould Plan for the Abolition of Applause and Demonstrations of All Kinds'); Enya, who has sung live a few times on TV shows; and Harry Nilsson, who did do a surprise guest spot for Without You with Ringo in Vegas in 1992 but never did a tour of his own. How to deal with it? Carly Simon devised a novel distraction method, telling Billboard in 2021 that "my band would have to spank me before I went on-stage… sometimes [that] overcame my heart fluttering and my panic… it really works." If only Glenn Gould had known.

Getty (4)

HOT GOSSIP AND GIL EVANS?

TV dance troupe Hot Gossip's 1981 LP *Geisha Boys And Temple Girls*, made with the B.E.F./Heaven 17, is a real curio of synth-pop. I've read that they made an earlier record with Richard James Burgess of Landscape which featured Gil Evans and David Sanborn. Can you shed any light?
Richard Gibson, e-mail

MOJO says: We can. Recorded in London and Los Angeles with Burgess and his Landscape partner John L. Walters at the desk, the LP titled *The Hollywood Jungle* also featured Airto Moreira, Harvey Mason, Ian Carr, Julie Tippetts and free jazz guitar hero Derek Bailey. "The Hot Gossip people did the vocals, but none of them were really singers. It kind of had a punk ethos, mixed with the greatest jazz musicians, and it definitely has its electronic side," Richard James Burgess told us. "I hope I'm not speaking out of school here, but I have this vision of Gil Evans cross legged under the grand piano on the shag pile carpet at the Manor [studio], smoking a pipe of hash. He kept saying, 'I'm not a piano player,' and we said, 'We don't care – we want your mind.' He was such a genius." Songs included covers of the Stones' Satisfaction, Adam Ant's Press Darlings and Hit The Road Jack, but after Hot Gossip commander Arlene Phillips heard the mixes, Virgin records pulled the plug. "We were bummed," Burgess says. "We were trying to make something that was innovative and progressive… I would love to see that record come out. I think people would be very amazed by it." Incidentally, Burgess and Walters can be heard on the super-fine *Landscape A Go-Go (The Story Of Landscape 1977-83)* box set, released earlier this year on Cooking Vinyl.

NEW NAME, SAME BAND (REVISITED)

Further to your question in MOJO 357, don't forget Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch who, post-Shadows, joined up with John Farrar to be Marvin, Welch & Farrar. More successful would have been Roy Wood and Jeff Lynne, who left The Move to form Electric Light Orchestra, with Wood subsequently leaving that line-up to form Wizzard.
James O'Brien, via e-mail

MOJO says: Thanks also to the Ask MOJO heads who pointed out *Buzzkunst* by the short-lived reunion of Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto from Buzzcocks, The Byrds' pseudo-re-formation that was McGuinn, Clark & Hillman, and the Rezillos/Revillos mutation.

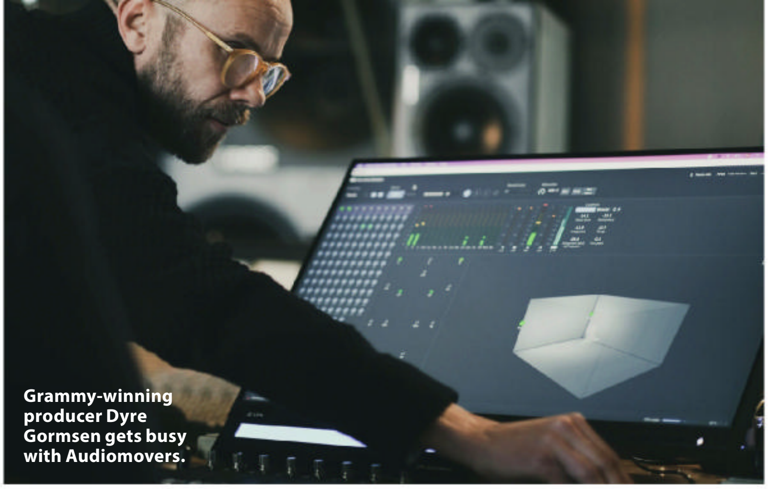
MOJO HELPED

The burly gent in Frankie's Relax video and in The Damned's Grimly Fiendish was none other than John Dair who was in many things including Batman (1989), but as I and others may fondly remember was aptly named 'Crusher' in Porridge.
Al Reid (now going straight), Musselburgh

MOJO says: Thanks, Al! And thanks also to e-mailer Stu Reid for identifying John Dair as the "man in the launderette" in the well-known Nick Kamen UK ad for Levi 501s in 1985.

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail **askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk** and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.



Grammy-winning producer Dyre Gormsen gets busy with Audiomovers.

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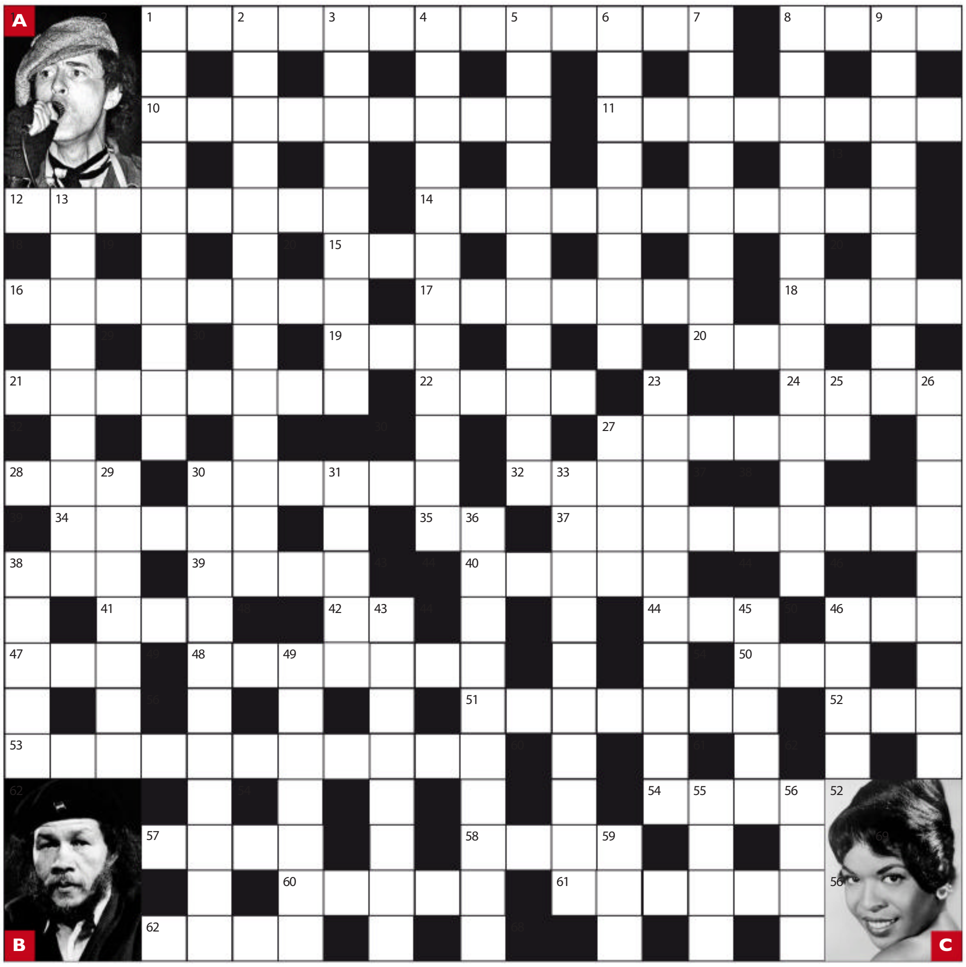
ANSWERS

MOJO 360

Across: 1 Harry Nilsson, 10 Joplin, 11 Walter Becker, 12 Sheila, 14 Dicks, 15 Preludes, 16 Win, 17 Bo, 18 Drella, 19 The Watcher, 20 Yat-Kha, 22 Jacket, 23 Neurotics, 25 Hook, 26 Go, 27 On, 28 Jerome, 29 Lol, 30 Dissolve, 34 Is, 36 Toe, 37 Fab, 38 XTC, 40 Atomic Cafe, 42 Eyes, 43 Tulsa, 46 UR, 47 Anatomy, 48 Sexy, 50 Oriole, 52 MCA, 53 Tale, 54 LCD, 55 Static, 56 Jean, 57 Sun, 58 Tin, 60 Lua, 62 Economy, 65 Mbira, 66 Nonet, 67 East, 68 Geesin

Down: 1 How Will I Know, 2 Roll Away The Stone, 3 Yield Not To Temptation, 4 I'm Back, 5 Socks, 6 Overpowered, 7 Total Eclipse, 8 Blindness, 9 Unrest, 13 Her Majesty, 17 Be, 19 Tango, 21 Jane Birkin, 24 Eolian, 27 Ova, 29 Locomotion, 31 It, 32 Soul Station, 33 LFO, 35 SF, 38 Xenon, 39 Cecil, 41 Etta James, 44 Sean, 45 Axl, 47 Aldi, 49 Yes, 51 Octave, 52 MC Lyte, 59 News, 61 Dare, 63 Now, 64 Meg

Winner:
Steve Darby of **Exeter** wins a DALI EQUI system with OBERON C speakers and a Sound Hub Compact.



Getty (3)

ACROSS

1 See photoclue A (6,7)
8 Analogue synth named for its creator, Dr Robert (4)
10 The Cure, proximately (5,2,2)
11 Paul Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo seek shelter (8)
12 Howard Werth's cult rockers (8)
14 Bowie's classic of 1974 (7,4)
15 The kind of whiskey enjoyed by Pete Seeger, Tex Ritter and Nick Cave (3)
16 The Lovin' Spoonful in reverie (8)
17 Blue Mitchell's blue garment (7)
18 ---- *Offender* (Keith Richards LP) (4)
19 Wishbone, Daniel or Ra Tempel (3)
20 Label behind bendy 'Dynaflex' vinyl (3)
21 Grace Jones's Guy (8)
22 R&B singer ---- 'Juice' Jones (4)
24 Her big hit was All Kinds Of Everything (4)
27 The Stranglers' album for cats (6)
28 Nilsson song covered by Aimee Mann (3)
30 Chris Pope's Mod revivalists The ------ (6)
32 Smashing Pumpkins' take five in 1994 (4)
34 Taylor Swift and Bon Iver team-up (5)
35 Alias Erika Elder (2)
37 Glen Campbell's Wichita Lineman follow-up (9)
38 Indie home to Hüsker Dü, Dinosaur Jr, Minutemen etc. (3)
39 Cleveland proto-punks The Electric ---- (4)
40 *Machine*, *Kream* or *Sweete* (5)
41 Athens, GA's biggest band (1.1.1)
42 Four songs on a 7-inch (2)
44 Colour of LPs by King Crimson, Black Uhuru and The Communards (3)
46 Rock radio format (3)
47 How Long? They asked in 1974 (3)
48 Kool And The Gang show appreciation in '85 (7)
50 New Order song thought to be about Ian Curtis (3)
51 Paul Revere's band The ------- (7)
52 (Don't Fear) The Reaper rockers, in short (3)
53 Mansun on a nicking spree? (11)
54 Sonic Youth's "goth album" (4)
57 Glasgow label, home of The Blue Nile (4)
58 Leeds post-rockers, makers of *Cold House* (4)
60 Death In Vegas' song for funerals? (5)
61 Prince's City (6)
62 See photoclue B (4)

DOWN

1 P. Paul Fenech's music for the deceased, The ------ ---- (6,4)
2 Sonny Terry's pal (7,6)
3 "He said he swam to China, and he'll sell you South Carolina." (Cab Calloway, 1932) (6,3)
4 Their albums include *Woodface* and *Temple Of Low Men* (7,5)
5 Photographer for the Fania label (3,8)
6 Where Patti Smith tuned her radio (8)
7 Lyricist for Sinatra songs including Let's Get Away From It All (3,5)
8 Quincy Jones goes crazy, calmly (6,7)
9 Animotion's infatuated hit of 1985 (9)
13 Keyboardist with The Fall, Blue Orchids and The Fates (3,6)
23 See photoclue C (5,5)
26 Original Animals organist (4,5)
27 How Thomas Dolby sees the *Earth*? (4)
29 Their big hit was More Than Words in 1991 (7)
30 Pirate, Tornado, and British session drumming legend (4,7)
31 What you put your drums on (5)
33 Whitfield Crane's band (4,3,3)
36 Celebrated sleeve designer at Warner Bros (2,8)
38 Mick and John Head's band (5)
43 Reggae trio who hit with Long Shot Kick De Bucket (8)
45 Pet Shop Boys' remix LP series (5)
46 The giants of Swedish pop (4)
49 *Con Todo* -- ----- (Khruangbin) (2,5)
55 Veteran German DJ Sven ---- (4)
56 FSOL alias (4)
59 Springsteen's unusual lightning (3)

The Best Of 2023

Mac attack: The Raincoats (from left) Palmolive, Vicky Aspinall, Ana Da Silva and Gina Birch in 1979.

Gina Birch and The Raincoats

It began with The Slits and punk's omni-promise. Then the '80s and internal fracture necessitated a hiatus.

HELLO 1977

I was kind of aware that something was going on when I came down to London in the autumn of 1976. I'd actually chanced upon the first Sex Pistols gig before that, when I was looking for an art school to come to. I moved into a room in a squat off Westbourne Grove and went to loads of gigs – exciting times!

In the autumn, I met Ana [Da Silva, guitar and singer] at Hornsey Art School. She grew up in Madeira and knew a lot about music, and together we explored what was happening. We went to the Roxy almost every night. It was only when I saw The Slits play their first gig in Harlesden [in March 1977] that the penny dropped. They were an autonomous group of young women doing something really wild, something not mediated by men, and I was completely stunned. I was like, I'd love to be in that group, and standing there it almost felt possible that I could be. Before, it had never entered my head. After seeing The Slits, we started joking about having our own group.

It took me a couple of months before I plucked up the courage to walk into a guitar shop on Charing Cross Road and ask for their cheapest bass, a Gibson copy for 30 pounds. A friend told me how to tune it, and the rest was me learning stuff from reggae bass lines. At first we played in Ana's living room in her flat off Golborne Road and our first gig was in November '77, supporting Tymon Dogg at The Tabernacle. We had about five songs and my tutor from college came and basically said, "Don't give up the day job." We played at a pub and this international performance art festival curator from Warsaw turned up and invited us to Warsaw, so our fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh gigs, we're playing at this weird festival. On the second night people threw eggs and the paper described us as 'Whores Escaped From Prison'.

I wanted a band and I wanted a gang. As I've said before, The Raincoats hoovered up people who got ejected from The Slits. Unbelievably, Palmolive [drummer] got thrown out so she came to play with us, which was a dream come true, and then Vicky [Aspinall, violin] joined. I think only when they joined did it feel right.

"On the second night people threw eggs."
GINA BIRCH

GOODBYE 1984

Palmolive had left and we'd got different members coming in. The whole punk thing had kind of faded and become all about money and glamour and MTV, and it felt like the opposite of what punk had been for us. We were just kind of fracturing.

We weren't even going to make [1984 farewell] *Moving*, but Shirley [O'Loughlin], our manager, said, "You've got all these songs, just do it," so we made them as best as we could. We decided in the studio that the one who initiated the song would kind of produce it, so we were separate entities really. At the beginning, you've got the same impetus, and as you get more into it, your motivations shift. There were moments where you feel constricted or restricted by each other. It was like, you know, Don't tell me what to do! We were no longer functioning together as a group. I don't remember that we had a 'last meeting' and I can't even remember if we did any more gigs. It was over.

We never really thought that we would be a mark in history. We were just this band that came and went, and by the time we made *Moving*, I don't think anybody gave a damn about us. I think we were just excited to do something else. Ana did Roseland and I did a group called Dorothy with Vicky.

Later, when the CDs of the LPs came out [in 1993], Ana and I got together in my living room and played In Love and Fairytale In The Supermarket and we were like, Whoa, that's so great! We thought it'd be fun to do two or three shows to celebrate the CDs coming out. Then I got this phone call asking if The Raincoats wanted to go on tour with Nirvana.

Recently we played at the White Cube, and we played at the Pompidou Centre in Paris just before lockdown. You pick up the threads, and I think, as time goes on, the more Ana and I appreciate each other, hugely.

As told to Ian Harrison

Gina Birch's I Play My Bass Loud is out now on Third Man.

Moving on: (from left) Da Silva, Aspinall and Birch contemplate their last LP, 1982; (left) Birch today.

Janette Beckman, Eric Watson (Courtesy The Raincoats), Eva Vermandel

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